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ABSTRACT

A study assessed the relevance of work-based learning approaches used in school-to-work efforts. Evidence indicated that employers were steadily raising the entry requirements into the low end of the labor market. Despite the serious skill deficiencies of welfare recipients, employers felt no responsibility to people who lacked the basic skills needed to hold a job and provided little support for individuals who could not function effectively in a work environment. They provided limited training for entry-level workers, but were receptive to helping welfare recipients. School-to-work models incorporated work experience and learning at work through mentoring, contextual learning, and credentialing of competencies and skills learned on the job. Three skills-related challenges facing welfare recipients could be addressed through work-based learning approaches in paid employment or community-service placements: understanding the workplace; learning a range of skills and knowledge broader than needed to accomplish immediate job tasks; and getting employers to recognize credits for skills and knowledge mastered on the job. Technical assistance and integration with the education system are still needed to assist welfare recipients' efforts to get jobs and advance in a career. These policy directions were identified: grants/support for third parties, laboratories and demonstration programs, financial incentives for employers, and integration of the welfare, employment and training, and education systems. (Appendixes contain instruments and 94 references.) (YLB)

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Learning at Work in a Work-Based Welfare System: Opportunities and Obstacles

Lessons from the School-to-Work Experience

by Judith Combes Taylor
Jobs for the Future

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"*Learning at Work*

is a timely and important report. It will spark debate and new research on the importance of quality work experience and work-based learning for low-skill welfare recipients. Every policymaker and employer concerned about the transition from welfare to work should read this valuable document."

William Julius Wilson
Professor of Social Policy
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
Author of *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*

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This project tapped the wisdom and perspective of many people, inside and outside Jobs for the Future. Individuals who gave their time for interviews in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and around the country are listed at the end of this report. We also want to thank the employers who took time from their busy schedules to respond to our survey.

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Finally, JFF thanks the Joyce Foundation for its generous support of this project.

PREFACE

This report is being issued at a pivotal moment in American social policy. The new federal welfare legislation—built around work requirements and time limits on benefits—emphasizes work as the way out of poverty and dependence. Yet, there has been almost no serious discussion of how the work component of welfare programs (either paid jobs or community service placements) can be supported and enriched to become a *learning* experience that helps individuals develop skills and advance to self-sufficiency.

Our report puts this challenge front and center. We present evidence from JFF's work on school-to-career strategies and from a year-long research project which included interviews with employers in Milwaukee and Cleveland. We interviewed employers on the extent to which they might be willing and able to increase the learning component of their low-skill jobs—and how community institutions can play an important supportive role. We use the lens of learning at work to help bolster efforts to focus the welfare debate on advancement out of poverty, not just on placement in low-wage jobs. To date, this approach has received little debate or attention.

We found that work-based components of school-to-work initiatives—mentoring, contextual learning, and credentialing of skills learned on the job—can be important elements of efforts to turn welfare work experience into opportunities for learning and advancement. However, if work-based learning is to diffuse broadly in community service placement or paid work settings, public policy will have to make learning and advancement explicit priorities, and provide incentives to promote such innovations.

We at Jobs for the Future hope that this report increases attention to, and emphasis on, practices and policies that use new, mandated work requirements to help welfare recipients become more successful in the labor market and in life. This is no easy task. But there are few more important challenges facing our nation today.

Hilary C. Pennington
President, Jobs for the Future

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

U.S. social policy has reached an historic juncture. With enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Congress and the President have agreed to end the 60-year-old entitlement of poor children to cash benefits. They have made state flexibility, time limits for benefits, and "aid in exchange for work" the centerpiece of national welfare policy. They have made good on the President's 1992 campaign promise to "end welfare as we know it."

This legislation reflects reform initiatives that have been in motion at the state and national levels for some time: work requirements for welfare recipients and time limits on benefits. The legislation makes work the core of welfare policy. It envisions the movement of unprecedented numbers of welfare recipients into unsubsidized employment.

Appropriately, the policy debate has focused on where the jobs will come from to absorb these new entrants into the labor market. Yet, all but absent from the welfare reform debate has been discussion of work experience itself—how to increase the likelihood that work experience and learning on the job might enable welfare recipients to climb out of dependence and poverty.

With well over a million low-skill individuals expected to enter the paid labor market in the coming years and more expected to take community service placements while receiving benefits, this question becomes critically important: How can work experience available to the welfare population be enhanced or supported so that work becomes not just a requirement, but also a learning experience, that can lead towards self-sufficiency?

Jobs for the Future comes to this challenge from our experience with programs linking school and work-based learning for young people. We have been struck by the powerful effects that well-designed workplace experiences, tied to supports and learning opportunities outside of work, can have on the attitudes, aspirations, and performance of young people. There is growing evidence from the school-to-work (or school-to-career) movement that work-based learning improves self-esteem, and teaches and reinforces basic and technical skills. It also provides a valuable opportunity to understand workplace culture and expectations, and to develop networks.

Jobs for the Future felt that lessons emerging from school-to-work about the characteristics of quality work-based learning programs might offer important insights to policymakers and practitioners grappling with the work component of welfare reform. With funding from the Joyce Foundation, we conducted an

initial assessment of the relevance of work-based learning approaches from school-to-work initiatives.

We conclude that three core elements of school-to-work initiatives—mentoring relationships at the workplace, contextual learning and instruction, and credentialing of skills learned at work—can be important components of efforts to help low-skill workers get and keep better jobs. For such efforts to diffuse broadly, work-based learning approaches must address the interests of "dual clients"—the individual participants *and* employers who provide work opportunities. Nevertheless, the extent to which work *alone* can be expected to raise skill levels and lead to advancement for welfare recipients should not be overestimated. Significant differences between welfare-to-work and school-to-work populations, institutions, and partnerships must be addressed. This will require creative practice at the local level. It will also require policy changes at the state and federal levels that create new incentives for employers and promote the development of an institutional infrastructure and supports that can make it easier to strengthen welfare recipients' learning in community service placements and low-skill employment settings.

The Low-Skill Job Market: Employer Expectations/Welfare Recipients' Readiness

The study began by assessing the evidence on skills employers value and expect from entry-level workers and how well welfare recipients meet these standards.

We identified two "tiers" of entry-level jobs. The less-common first-tier jobs require only the most basic work-related "soft skills," such as work discipline and the ability to take direction from a supervisor. Without these skills and behaviors, it is difficult to get any job and almost impossible to keep one. Second-tier jobs require additional skills in literacy, technical areas, communication, and/or problem solving.

There is evidence that employers are steadily raising the "hurdle bar" into the low end of the labor market as the use of computers, team approaches to work organization, and customer service become increasingly important. We identified another set of skills and knowledge that employers are unlikely to seek, but which are becoming increasingly critical to advancement in the labor market, even at the low end. These are analytical and "navigational" skills that help workers understand more about how to succeed and advance in a firm, industry, or occupation.

How is the welfare population likely to fare in this changing labor market? As a group, welfare recipients have serious skill deficiencies. Only about half have a high school diploma, and about 90 percent have no more education than that. Perhaps 10 percent of the welfare population is sufficiently experienced and skilled to advance quickly out of entry-level jobs. Of the rest, though these estimates are quite rough, as many as one-third lack sufficient work discipline and basic soft skills to get and keep a job long enough to build a credible work history. The other two-thirds are unlikely to advance without acquiring additional skills. Among all welfare recipients, an understanding of what it takes to hold a job and build a career is limited: according to one study, only 4 percent have four or more years of experience in the labor market; a third have never held a job for more than six months.

Employer Training Practices for Workers in Low-Skill Jobs

Our estimates illustrate the extent to which most welfare recipients will need significant assistance, support, and skill development if they are to enter and advance in the labor market. Many will need pre-employment training in basic soft skills to secure stable employment. Most will need to acquire additional academic, technical, and soft skills if they are to advance to jobs that pay a living wage.

Given those needs, what training do employers typically provide entry-level, low-skill workers? How willing are they to enhance the learning content of low-skill jobs? To understand more about these issues, Jobs for the Future conducted a telephone survey of 43 employers in two low-unemployment Midwestern cities, in industries with significant concentrations of entry-level, low-skill jobs. We probed training practices for such jobs, looking for evidence of structured learning at the workplace.

The employers surveyed felt strongly that they have no responsibility to people who lack the basic skills needed to hold a job. As a group, they provide little

support for individuals who cannot function effectively in a work environment. These employers provided limited training for new entry-level workers—primarily demonstrating job-specific tasks—but little explanation of what the worker is doing, or how that fits with other jobs in the firm or department.

At the same time, the employers surveyed were receptive to ideas about increasing the quality and effectiveness of learning at work—provided the effort would require only a minimal commitment from them in terms of time and money, and it could be seen as contributing to the bottom line. Moreover, certain instructional practices already in use in these workplaces could provide a "platform" for expanding work-based learning. These include the widespread use of what many employers call the "buddy system," as well as approaches to imparting a broader knowledge of the business or industry.

In addition, many employers were receptive—at least in a phone interview—to the idea of helping welfare recipients entering the workforce overcome a weak work ethic, inadequate technical skills, and limited knowledge of what it takes to advance in the company. A significant minority of respondents feel it would be "easy" to convince their companies to provide some additional support to help welfare recipients succeed.

Work-Based Learning Strategies: Lessons From School-to-Work

School-to-work initiatives provide a lens through which to look at work-based learning—its strengths and limitations, as well as the challenges involved in its effective implementation for different populations. School-to-work efforts, which involve partnerships between employers, schools, and other community institutions, try to change both the pedagogy and the base of experience outside the classroom for participating students. Work experience is combined with classroom instruction that uses work as context and motivator to academic learning at high standards. Adult mentoring relationships are emphasized, as are long-term involvement with and supports for young people. The goal is to enable all students to make better choices and smoother transitions from high school to careers or to further education.

Jobs for the Future has identified four design elements that are essential to creating high-quality, effective work-based learning opportunities in school-to-work initiatives:

- Broad agreement on program goals and the roles of the various partners;
- Careful design of the structure and content of work-based learning experiences, including specifying learning goals and documenting on-the-job learning;
- Reinforcement of workplace learning outside the daily routines of work; and
- Adequate academic, social, and administrative supports for participating youth and institutional partners.

Most school-to-work models incorporate work experience and learning at work in the following three ways:

- **Mentoring relationships with caring and competent adults** who both provide emotional support and facilitate development are critically important to the success of less experienced youth and adults. Mentoring can increase the likelihood of keeping a job and navigating the workplace. It can be promoted by training supervisors or co-workers in mentoring skills. Another strategy is to instruct program participants in how to find their own mentors and benefit from the relationship.
- **Contextual learning and instruction** is a pedagogical approach that uses actual experiences and situations, at work or in other aspects of one's life, as the context for instruction and the application of academic, social, and technical skills and knowledge. For many learners, abstract and passive classroom learning poses significant obstacles. "Learning through doing," embedded in more active and experiential instructional strategies, is often more effective, since people are more likely to apply themselves and to persevere when the knowledge matters in ways they understand directly.
- **Credentialing of competencies and skills learned on the job**, many argue, would help employers and job seekers give each other clearer signals than the current reliance on high school diplomas allows. As they have improvised ways to credential workplace skills, a number of school-to-work and youth-employment programs have implemented

learning plans that specify what young people are expected to learn on the job—and how well they have performed in the workplace.

School-to-Work and Welfare-to-Work: Lessons and Challenges

Welfare-to-work is an umbrella term for a range of programs designed to help move welfare recipients into employment. The majority do not actually involve work experience, but focus on services that include: job search and job placement; adult basic education; job-specific training; education and training programs; and combinations of these services. Two approaches have been developed: a "work-first" or "quick attachment to the labor force" approach, which emphasizes job search and placement; and a "human capital" approach, which focuses on basic skill development and, to a lesser extent, job specific training.

Work experience has been central to certain welfare programs, usually called "workfare," which require recipients to accept unpaid work experience in government or private non-profit agencies as a condition for public assistance. In general, these small, short-duration programs have paid little attention to issues of learning on the job, workplace pedagogy and supports, skill credentialing, or the integration of work and classroom instruction.

School-to-work and work experience programs for welfare recipients share some characteristics. Both look to the workplace to build confidence and competencies and to motivate behavior. Both demand new roles for professionals (teachers, counselors, caseworkers) who must now know more about, and work more directly with, employers and work settings. To be effective, both must address the needs of both participants and employers.

At the same time, there are important differences between school-to-work and most welfare work experience programs. School-to-work programs are explicitly designed to integrate learning and work. Most welfare work programs are about work and its intrinsic value, not work as a learning opportunity. Other critically important differences include the following:

1. **Employer perceptions** of young people in school-to-work programs differ greatly from their views on welfare recipients and low-skill employees.
2. **The expectations held by the two target populations** may be quite divergent, influencing the ability of new program opportunities to affect the self-confidence and motivation of participants.
3. **School-to-work initiatives rely on schools** for academic instruction and a safe place to reflect on lessons from the worksite. This institutional base is absent in current welfare programming.

Work-Based Learning for Welfare Recipients: Opportunities in Paid Employment

We have identified three skill-related challenges facing many welfare recipients that work-based learning approaches in paid employment or in community service placements could help address:

- Understanding the workplace and how to "navigate" it;
- Learning a range of skills and knowledge broader than what is needed to accomplish immediate job tasks; and
- Getting employers to recognize and accept credits for skills and knowledge mastered on the job.

The three work-based learning strategies identified in this study can help address those challenges: *mentoring* to impart a wider understanding of the workplace; *contextual learning* to help workers learn a range of skills; and *credentialing* to make it possible for workers to acquire marketable credit for skills learned on the job. Private sector employers we surveyed had the following reactions to these strategies:

Mentoring: While we did not find well-developed mentoring programs for low-skill workers among the employers we surveyed, there is fairly widespread use of the more limited "buddy system." In addition, these employers recognize and have a positive association with the concept of mentoring. They perceive support from more experienced coworkers as an effective strategy for teaching skills that are essential to the firm's productivity.

Contextual Learning: We found some indication that employers are beginning to express a need to provide more than job-specific knowledge to low-skill employees. If employers are to increase the use of contextual learning approaches to enhance the

skills and knowledge of low-wage employees, two challenges will have to be overcome. First, employers will require evidence that more attention to training and learning on the job can reduce turnover among entry-level workers, increase loyalty, or improve job performance. Furthermore, employers must have access to effective, easy-to-implement mechanisms for structuring contextual learning into existing orientation and training.

Credentialing: Learning plans could help welfare recipients entering the job market. They could be used to structure community service placements so that learning objectives are identified and progress is documented. Learning plans could also help welfare recipients who have "cycled" through a number of short-term jobs over the years to recognize that they have learned skills in their many jobs and to be able to demonstrate those skills to prospective employers.

Despite these advantages, very few of the employers we surveyed use learning plans or other internal skill-credentialing tools; few are interested in developing them. Yet, this general aversion should not obscure employers' interest in receiving reliable credentials from job applicants about experience and skills. Third-party credentialing of work-related skills might benefit both low-skill workers and employers interested in hiring them.

Ultimately, given the nature of the U.S. education and employment systems, the credentials that matter to earnings and employment outcomes are postsecondary educational ones. Where possible, work-based learning efforts should be integrated with classroom-based programs providing high school diplomas, GEDs, and postsecondary degrees and certificates, so that participants can advance in both work and schooling as they desire.

An Opportunity: The Community Service Placement

In most states, a significant segment of the welfare population will be unable to secure paid work after collecting benefits for two years (the most common onset of the work requirement in state plans). These individuals will have to accept community service placements. While community service placement efforts in welfare programming have traditionally focused on employment, not learning at work, they can be used as a particularly effective vehicle for work-based learning as defined in this report. Providers of unpaid work experience are more likely to be receptive to integrating work and learning than employers providing paid work.

A number of innovative unpaid work experience programs are indeed trying to use community placements as a context for learning at work and in related classroom instruction. These examples provide reason for optimism that community-based settings could be greatly strengthened as learning venues for welfare recipients. In these settings, well-designed work-based learning approaches could help non-job-ready individuals develop basic social and "soft skills," as well as valuable career advancement skills. With appropriate tools, materials, and support, these programs could prepare recipients for the world of paid work and certify participants' skills when key competencies have been achieved.

The community placement setting is not without its challenges as a learning environment. Participating organizations frequently lack the administrative structures, staff capacity, and sensitivity to learning methods that are important for providing effective work-based learning. Adding a training responsibility could overburden organizations already stretched quite thin. In addition, if the placements are not well-designed, they could simply be out-of-the-home destinations where recipients learn nothing and experience a further erosion in their self-image and motivation. And because these placements are typically unpaid, it can be hard to replicate the high stakes and pressures of an actual workplace.

Two Serious Gaps: Technical Assistance and Integration with the Education System

For organizations that provide community service placements and for wage-paying employers of low-skill workers in the private, public, and non-profit sectors, the challenges of developing quality learning opportunities at work for entry-level employees are daunting. Employers providing work experience will need help designing work activities, developing their staffs, and obtaining curricular materials and easy-to-implement learning tools. In particular, two gaps

must be filled to assist the efforts of welfare recipients to get jobs and advance in a career: technical assistance in the provision and support of learning at work; and better integration of work-based learning with the mainstream educational system.

Technical assistance: Few employers possess the expertise to develop and implement their own work-based learning programs, and few are likely to deliver certain types of learning to their low-skill employees, such as academic subjects and career-advancement skills. Work-based learning will spread more rapidly if third-party organizations provide employers and their workers with ideas, models, materials, and easy-to-use training tools—and support their use of those materials and tools.

Integration with the education system: Learning at work will need to be better integrated with educational institutions in which broader knowledge development and credentialing are possible. Ultimately, the key to effective learning programs is the partnership between employers and education providers—and a carefully designed division of labor regarding skills and lessons that can be learned on the job and those that must be learned off site.

In its determination to make work the centerpiece of welfare policy, the new welfare legislation creates disincentives to pre-employment education and training. Contrary to evidence that argues for creative strategies to integrate work- and classroom-based learning, welfare reform promotes the *substitution* of work experience for educational programming. The pendulum will have to swing back toward greater integration with the education system if welfare reform is going to help a large segment of the welfare population keep and advance in jobs. In the meantime, local programs will have to be creative in designing classroom learning components that build upon and can be scheduled around work.

Directions for Policy

Work experience alone will not "solve" welfare dependency. The most effective work-first strategies combine structured group job search with education, training, and work experience for those who have not found jobs, coupled with access to employment information and support services once they find employment. In our view, public policymakers at the state and federal levels will have to consider more active policy interventions if they want work-based learning to diffuse more rapidly and effectively through welfare programs. A concerted effort to use work to improve the life prospects of welfare recipients cannot rest with initial placement into jobs, but most be bolstered by ongoing career advice, support services, and educational opportunity. Moreover, the market alone will not generate the opportunities and assistance for large numbers of employers to provide quality work-based learning for low-skill workers.

At first blush, it would seem that these proposals will be resisted because of cost considerations, since federal welfare expenditures are being reduced by tens of billions of dollars over the next five years. However, in the first few years of implementation of the new welfare bill, many of the nation's largest states are receiving short-term windfalls in welfare dollars from the federal government due to reductions in caseloads that have occurred since the date used in the legislation to calculate state funding formulas. If there is any time to reallocate resources and experiment to enrich the learning component of welfare-to-work programs, that time is now.

Federal and state implementation of welfare reform that incorporates work-based learning as a strategy for moving welfare recipients into self-sufficiency will require the following:

1. **Grants/support for third parties**: Employers—whether in the public or private sectors, whether they provide paid jobs or community service placements—are unlikely to be proactive in developing richer, more structured work-based learning programs. They will need help finding approaches, tools, and supports they can use easily. The infrastructure that can provide and maintain those supports needs to be built and sustained at the local level, but incentive grants and "venture capital" for development of tools, materials, staff development strategies, and other supports should be funded by states.
2. **Laboratories and demonstration projects:** Developing effective work-based learning programs

for welfare recipients is still largely uncharted terrain. States and the federal government should support highly visible demonstration projects that encourage innovation and experimentation with different models of designing, delivering, and administering work-based learning for welfare recipients. These demonstrations should be carefully studied and evaluated.

3. **Financial incentives for participating employers:** If, as a nation, we want employers to deepen their efforts to turn work experiences into learning experiences that make a difference in employment and earnings of disadvantaged individuals over time, financial incentives will be needed. The record of on-the-job training for welfare recipients has been mixed. While some small programs have had positive earnings and employment impacts, they have received little employer support and have only reached a small segment of the caseload. Wage subsidies for hiring low-skill workers in employment and training programs have historically been plagued by windfalls for employers, stigma for eligible individuals, and lack of employer enthusiasm. The most effective incentives might be those that reduce training costs or cut the costs of participation by funding intermediaries to simplify and reduce employer responsibilities.
4. **Integration of the welfare, employment and training, and education systems**: Ultimately, the welfare system must be more closely and coherently linked to the education system that provides valued credentials. Policy should encourage and create incentives that increase vertical linkages among the education, training, and welfare systems. In this way, they can begin to converge into one coherent learning and workforce development system. This system should be based on the integration of work and learning and closer relations among employers, educational institutions, and public training systems. It should be built around clear ladders or maps connecting short-term job-training programs to longer term postsecondary educational credentials, as well as adequate social supports and guidance that can help less-prepared individuals overcome some of the obstacles keeping them from staying at work and engaging in learning long enough to benefit and to advance.

As federal and state governments try to make welfare a work-centered system, welfare policy will have to become more closely aligned and integrated with both workforce-development and education policies. Work-based learning may be a thread that can help bring these diverse systems closer together. But policymakers will have to want to design and implement ways to link these three systems. And they will have to be committed to building a system that rises to the standards of modernized employers and postsecondary educational institutions.

A Changed Political Reality: Time Limits and Work Requirements

U.S. social policy has reached an historic juncture. With enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Congress and the President have agreed to end the 60-year-old entitlement of poor children to cash benefits. They have made state flexibility, time limits for benefits, and "aid in exchange for work" the centerpiece of national welfare policy. They have made good on the President's 1992 campaign promise to "end welfare as we know it."

This emphasis on transforming the welfare check-writing system into one based on work has evolved over time. The idea of requiring welfare recipients to work has been part of federal welfare policy since the 1960s. The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program created by the Family Support Act of 1988 provided funding for education, training, work experience, and job-search activities for welfare recipients. It stipulated that by 1995 states should require at least 20 percent of single heads of households with children three years or older to participate in JOBS activities as a condition of receiving full welfare benefits.

During the past five years, states have taken the initiative to redesign the basic rules of welfare. While the specifics have varied, most state reforms have had two common elements: time limits on the receipt of benefits and a requirement that a majority of adult recipients work in exchange for benefits.

With waivers from the federal government—and, in some cases, without waiver approval—more than two dozen states began to experiment with time-limited welfare before passage of the new federal legislation. These demonstrations require recipients, after a specified time on welfare, to obtain employment or take community service placements. The most ambitious and controversial is W-2, Wisconsin Works, which explicitly substitutes subsidized employment or a position in a work program for cash aid.[1]

The new federal legislation follows these state demonstrations. Federal entitlement to welfare benefits is ended. Lifetime cash assistance is limited to five years. Able-bodied adults are required to work after two years (with hardship exemptions for up to 20 percent of each state's caseload). Other provisions tighten eligibility for federal funds, including food stamps, SSI, and Medicaid.

This legislation is justifiably controversial. President Clinton had initially proposed $10 billion of increased funding over five years to help states pay for more education and training, expanded child care, universal health care, and last-resort government jobs for those who had not found work after two years. Instead, the new law cuts $60 billion from the federal anti-poverty budget. Moreover, the law

[1] None of these state demonstrations has operated long enough for any recipient to be completely terminated from assistance.

ends federal matching of state aid to needy families, effectively ending incentives to maintain state welfare aid. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York has charged that the legislation does not reform welfare, but repeals it. Others argue that many states will be unable to meet the goal of putting recipients to work, given the limited resources available for cash aid, workfare, training, child care and other supports combined—and the zero sum game created by block grants where a dollar spent on a given benefit or service is a dollar no longer available for other services to recipients.

The scale of work experience called for in this legislation is unprecedented—and untested. Federal law requires states to place 50 percent of their recipients in work activities within six years. The specifics of implementation are complex. States can lower their work participation rates by reducing welfare rolls below 1995 levels. The federal government has not defined "work activities" and other terms used in the legislation. The extent to which states are able to meet or redefine federal requirements will be worked out in practice in the next few years. Gearing up to find paid work or provide community work experience for well over a million predominantly low-skilled individuals will require state welfare systems to expand greatly their capacity for finding and creating employment opportunities. It will require new levels of cooperation and commitment from private employers.

States, too, will be forced to stretch. In the past, states have not embraced welfare-to-work responsibilities particularly enthusiastically. In 1991, when federal law required states to provide only 7 percent of the caseload with work experience, states met the minimum requirements but went no further. Wisconsin's controversial W-2 program explicitly refuses to require the state to guarantee a work placement to all eligible participants. Skepticism is warranted about the ability of private and public sector employers to absorb this influx of new labor market entrants—and the impact of this surge in labor supply on wages and employment rates.

Work Experience: How Much of a Learning Opportunity?

Aid in exchange for work has become the centerpiece of welfare policy. Given this sea change, one would expect there to be a large and growing literature and debate on the nature of work experience for recipients—and strategies to make work an important learning experience for them so that they will be able to climb out of dependence and poverty. Yet, disconcertingly, policymakers, practitioners, and advocates alike have been silent on this issue. All but absent from the welfare reform debate has been any significant discussion of work experience itself—how it might be structured; how to enhance the learning content of the community service or paid work experience; how to increase the likelihood that work experience and learning on the job might improve labor market success.

This report was prepared to begin to address this gap. In it, we focus on ways that work experiences for welfare recipients might be structured to provide more meaningful learning opportunities, so recipients might be better prepared to get and keep a job and to advance out of low-skill, low-wage employment. Our primary goal is to bring attention to the potential value of work-based learning in welfare programming—and to suggest program and policy options that could encourage more effective work-based learning for the welfare population as it is pushed to enter the workforce.

Evidence from work experience programs for welfare recipients provides some guideposts for this study. Recent studies of workfare programs, which combine job search and unpaid work experiences in exchange for cash aid, indicate that these programs have been able to increase the earnings of recipients and reduce welfare payments. However, these gains have been too small to bring many recipients out of poverty. As Robert Lerman (1995) of the Urban Institute concludes, "the best evidence suggests that where cities or counties are willing to implement rigorous programs emphasizing job search and enforcing work requirements, about 5 to 8 percent more recipients will be working and the average earnings of welfare recipients will rise by $500 to $1000 a year. . . ."

A study by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) (Brock et al. 1993) found that unpaid work experience *alone*, at least as designed and operated in the 1980s, did not have a clear and consistent effect on employment, earnings, or welfare receipt. However, MDRC found that welfare-to-work

What is Work-Based Learning?

Work-based learning is frequently cited as a key component of quality career-oriented education and employment programs. However, there are a number of different interpretations of what constitutes work-based learning. In this report, we follow the definition of the Office of Technology Assessment (U.S. Congress 1995). While learning can occur during any work experience, work-based learning "refers to learning that results from work experience that is planned to contribute to the intellectual and career development" of those who are engaged in it. The learning content is planned and structured. Typically, work experience is supplemented with activities that apply, reinforce, refine, or extend the learning that occurs during work, so that attitudes, knowledge, skills and habits which the work experience alone may not encourage can be developed.

The OTA report identified five learning processes used in work-based learning. These are: experiential learning; work-group learning; mentoring; workplace instruction; and technology-assisted learning.

models that included job search, education, and training proved more effective in increasing employment and earnings and led to larger reductions in the use of welfare than work experience alone. The challenge—and opportunity—under the new legislation will be to find ways to combine and integrate services with employment, so that welfare receipt means more than a series of revolving-door, low-wage, dead-end work experiences.

There have been no studies of how the *quality* of work experience, or the kind of and intensity of learning on the job, might affect the ability of welfare recipients to get and keep a job or to improve their earnings and employment over time. Unpaid work experience programs which have been studied were of short duration, usually three months, and quite small. Moreover, they were not designed as learning opportunities, but rather as jobs required in exchange for benefits. While participants and supervisors alike reported that the work was not "make work," there was no attempt to use work as the context for structured learning; and there was no evidence that participants developed new competencies or skills (Brock et al. 1993).

On-the-job training (OJT) programs for welfare recipients have had a mixed record. Some small programs have had positive employment and earnings impacts; but employer enthusiasm for such programs was weak (Berlin 1996). Moreover, studies of OJT for welfare recipients have not gone "inside the black box" to identify the nature of the learning and training being provided in exchange for employer wage subsidies.

In the absence of both debate and research on learning at work for welfare recipients, Jobs for the Future undertook an exploratory project to assess both the potential for, and the interest in, strategies to enhance and increase work-based learning for welfare recipients expected to enter the workforce.

Project Description

Jobs for the Future approaches the welfare debate primarily from our experience with the design and delivery of work-based learning in school-to-work programs.[2] While we are quite conscious of the important differences between welfare and school-based populations and program contexts (see Chapter 3),

[2] Jobs for the Future generally uses the term "school-to-career" rather than "school-to-work" because we recognize that the key to self-sufficiency in the labor market is not simply getting a job, but being able to advance in a career. School-to-work is seen by many as a pejorative term, misleading because it implies a one-time transition to employment and unappealing because it is associated with entry-level work rather than career advancement. In this report, though, we use the more widely recognized term "school-to-work." We do so in order to preserve the parallels between welfare-to-work and school-to-work and because we do not want to confuse readers who may have passing, but not deep, familiarity with the school-to-work field and its internal debates.

we have been struck by the potentially powerful effects of well-designed workplace experiences on the attitudes, aspirations, and performance of alienated and low-achieving young people. For disadvantaged students participating in school-to-work programs, there is growing evidence that work-based learning improves self-esteem in ways that classroom learning does not, teaches and reinforces basic and technical skills, and provides an opportunity to understand workplace culture and expectations and to develop networks useful in future job searches. Based on our experience, we concluded that lessons emerging from the design and delivery of school-to-work programs nationally could inform the development of more effective work experience opportunities for welfare recipients.

With funding from the Joyce Foundation, Jobs for the Future undertook research to assess the relevance to welfare reform strategies of work-based learning approaches used in school-to-work efforts. The project involved: a literature review; a survey of employers in Cleveland and Milwaukee; interviews with practitioners in welfare-to-work and related fields in those cities; interviews with national experts; and a background paper on lessons from school-to-work and adult learning initiatives.

This report summarizes the results of our inquiry. In it, we assess lessons that can be learned and strategies that might be adapted. We address the potential—and limits—of work experience and work-based learning in helping welfare recipients transition to unsubsidized employment. We conclude with recommendations for policy and practice that can improve and enhance work-based learning for welfare recipients.

The report is organized in chapters that address the following questions:

1. **What skills and knowledge do welfare recipients and other low-wage workers need to succeed in today's labor market? What is known about the skills and knowledge that welfare recipients bring to the labor market?**

2. **What training do employers commonly provide entry-level and low-skill employees? How willing would employers be to enhance these efforts?**

3. **What lessons do school-to-work initiatives teach about work-based learning approaches?**

4. **How, if at all, might work-based learning be structured to improve the labor market prospects of low-skill workers in low-wage jobs?**

Assuming that policymakers and the public are interested in moving welfare recipients into the labor market and toward self-sufficiency—rather than "warehousing" them in ongoing subsidized employment or abandoning them and their families to unemployment and jobs paying far below the poverty level—the answer to each of these questions is important. Jobs for the Future hopes that this initial study sparks debate and new research on the role of work experience and work-based learning in welfare programming. We hope that this project increases attention to, and emphasis on, practices and policies that use the new, mandated work requirements to help longer-term welfare recipients become more successful in the labor market and in life.

CHAPTER ONE

The Low-Skill Job Market: Employer Expectations/Welfare Recipients' Readiness

Most welfare recipients enter the labor force in entry-level, low-skill jobs, and they stay there unless their work histories, skills, and access to opportunities improve significantly. To understand the potential for work-based learning to improve their chances of keeping a job or advancing, we need to understand the contours of both the demand for low-skill labor and the skills profile of the welfare population. What skills and knowledge do employers want and expect from entry-level employees? How prepared are welfare recipients to meet these expectations?

Skills and knowledge are critical to the success or failure of job seekers. Kathryn Porter (1990: 6) of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities has written:

> *The primary way AFDC recipients obtain stable jobs with adequate pay is by developing skills that make them competitive in the job market [that] not only increase the likelihood that [they] will get decent jobs, but also make it more likely that they will remain employed and will find other jobs if the first job ends.*

Of course, skills and knowledge are not the only factors that determine success in the labor market, nor are they the only criteria employers use in making hiring decisions. Other obstacles stand in the way of many individuals as they seek employment, obstacles that often eliminate them from consideration *before* their skills and experience are ever accurately assessed.

Discrimination against both welfare recipients and minorities is common as employers try to simplify hiring choices by generalizing from perceptions of or experience with some members of that group. Limited access to affordable child care, health care, and transportation, as well as mental or physical health problems, can be significant factors in the ability of welfare recipients to find and keep work.

The nature of the local labor market also affects employment outcomes. What entry-level jobs are available locally? Is the economy, particularly its low-end employment, expanding or in decline? It will be a lot easier to land a job in Dayton, Ohio, for example, where unemployment is quite low, than to secure even a fast-food job in Harlem, where local opportunities are limited.[1]

Given this important caveat, this chapter summarizes available evidence on the nature of the "fit" between the kinds of skills that employers want from entry-level employees and the proportion of the welfare caseload that can meet those requirements. We distinguish two "tiers" of the low-end labor market: jobs that require only the most basic work-related behaviors and attitudes, and those that

[1] Buss (1996) describes Dayton and the Midwest generally as places where a worker shortage "is beginning to constrain economic growth." Newman and Lennon (1995) describe intense competition among over-qualified applicants for relatively few, poorly-paid jobs in Harlem.

require more complex academic, technical, social, and/or career-oriented skills. We define the low-skill labor market as jobs requiring a high school diploma, a high school equivalency degree, or less.[2] Almost 90 percent of welfare recipients meet this educationally-defined qualification.[3]

The Importance of Entry-Level Soft Skills

Most basic to obtaining a job are certain entry-level "soft skills," including the ability to report for work regularly and on time, follow relatively complex directions from supervisors or co-workers, and interact with other employees and external contacts in ways that minimize disruptive conflict. People lacking these soft skills will have a difficult time getting a job and an even more difficult time keeping one (Moss and Tilly 1994; Holzer 1996). In other words, most of today's *low*-skill jobs are not *no*-skill jobs.

Entry-level soft skills are often learned in one's first few employment experiences or through non-paid experiences that provide lessons in the basics of responsibility, authority, and teamwork. The long-term welfare population is less likely than the general public to have had early work experiences that strengthen these work-related attitudes and behaviors. About 80 percent of the 1991 caseload had less than two years' paid work experience in the preceding five years (Center for Law and Social Policy 1996a). Half the welfare recipients who had been on AFDC for 60 or more months had no work experience in the year prior to the time they began receiving benefits (Pavetti 1995).

There is evidence that lack of these soft skills is a serious obstacle to labor market success. According to Rebecca Maynard (1995a: 23) of the University of Pennsylvania, "The main reason that young mothers [on AFDC] have trouble with employment is their lack of social skills to deal with workplace conflict." She cites as an example a program that trained teen mothers to work as sales clerks in malls: every teen left her job soon after placement, each because of conflicts at work. Research by Project Match in Chicago, which tracks recipients' progress carefully, indicates that among all participants who had been placed in jobs, 57 percent lost their first job within six months, 70 percent within twelve months (Herr and Halpern with Conrad 1991).

New York Times reporter, Jason DeParle (1994) followed Mary Ann Moore, a former welfare recipient from Cabrini Green in Chicago, into her workplace, a Salvation Army shelter. Conflict with a co-worker broke out almost immediately:

> *[The] conflict between Moore and her co-workers is typical of welfare recipients, and a reason they so often quit or get fired. As a younger woman, Moore walked away from jobs when she found her supervisor disagreeable or her co-workers assaulting her dignity. Indeed, her continued success on this job rests in large part on her ability to handle the conflicts, which arise virtually without pause.*

DeParle cites research on welfare recipients that concludes that "factors frequently cited by policymakers (lack of child care or technical skills, for instance) accounted for only a small portion of early job loss." He continues:

> *A host of other problems [concern] . . . the "rules of the world of work." These included such things as the ability to get to work on time and get along with co-workers and bosses. Many of the workers took an overly narrow view of their duties, including a cashier who refused to stock shelves and called it "favoritism" when raises went to employees who did the extra work.*

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[2] Some researchers, such as Harry Holzer (1996) and Arnold Packer (Packer and Wirt 1992), define the low-skill labor market to include all jobs that do not require a four-year college degree, but these definitions include many jobs that are unlikely to be available to the great majority of welfare recipients newly entering the labor market.

[3] This figure characterizes the 1991 caseload (Burtless 1995). Data from 1979 through 1989 distinguish between welfare recipients on the rolls for less than two years and those receiving benefits for more than five: for the longer-term caseload, only 5 percent have had any postsecondary education, compared to 20 percent for the shorter-term group (*New York Times* 1996).

Staff members of a neighborhood job-placement program interviewed for this project provided similar explanations of why an unexpectedly large number of their "job-ready" clients had either lost jobs or were experiencing difficulty. In terms similar to those used by sociologist Elijah Anderson (1990) to describe the oppositional culture of the street, they emphasized how different the culture of the workplace is from the one clients know and understand. The clash of cultures was most evident, and most damaging to job prospects, in relations with supervisors—especially when supervisors tried to talk with program participants about unsatisfactory work. Participants had two typical responses: turn away abruptly and leave, muttering under their breath, or take on the supervisor in an inappropriate, confrontational way.

What proportion of the welfare population lacks these entry-level soft skills and is unable to secure and keep even a low-skill, low-wage job? Most state laws and the new federal law recognize that, for a variety of reasons, a significant percentage of the welfare caseload (up to 20 percent in the federal act) is unable to work. Project Match's finding of almost two-thirds attrition in the first six months might serve as an upper bound. The welfare population in the Cabrini Green housing project is a particularly hard-to-employ subgroup, suffering from above average disadvantages and obstacles. Even if we assume that the Project Match estimate overstates by half the percentage of recipients who have inadequate job-holding skills, roughly one-third of the total caseload will have trouble getting and keeping jobs, able at best to string together a series of short-term positions that typically end in quitting or being let go (See Figure 1-1). (A woman in such circumstances who had to support herself and her family through earned income alone would earn less than $10,300 per year, which is what a *full-time* worker will make at the new minimum wage of $5.15/hour.)

Figure 1-1: Rough Estimates of Labor Market Preparedness of the Welfare Caseload

LABOR MARKET STATUS	ESTIMATED RECIPIENTS	LIKELY ANNUAL INCOME
Lack entry-level soft skills needed to get and keep jobs	about one-third *(will vary depending on the criteria used to determine exemptions from work mandates)*	less than $10,300 *(assuming intermittent employment at the new minimum wage)*
Have skills to get and keep jobs in the low-skill labor market but not advance	a little less than two-thirds *(will vary depending on local labor market conditions)*	between $10,300 and $18,000 *(assuming full-time employment at wages between $5.15 and $9.00/hour)*
Have skills to advance beyond low-skill labor market	perhaps 5 to 10 percent	more than $16,000

Although these data are troubling, a majority in the welfare caseload does have sufficient entry-level soft skills to get and keep a low-skill entry-level job. What kinds of jobs will be open to them?

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At the bottom of the low-skill labor market are jobs that require nothing more than basic job holding skills (see Figure 1-2). Whatever tasks must be performed in these "Tier One" jobs can be learned on the job. Two examples from the Jobs for the Future employer survey (see Chapter 2) are an industrial laundry worker who performs tasks such as loading and unloading machines and folding and stacking laundry and an assembly-line worker who folds cardboard in a gift box factory. Most jobs like these pay the minimum wage or somewhat higher, depending upon the labor market, union representation, and other factors.

Figure 1-2: Skills Needed to Enter, Stay and Advance in the Low-Skill Labor Market

TIER ONE JOBS: NO SPECIFIC SKILLS REQUIRED	
Entry-level soft skills	Basic work discipline (e.g., regular attendance and timeliness); ability to take direction from a supervisor; social skills to avoid disruptive conflict with co-workers and possibly customers.
Workplace tasks and processes	Training provided by the employer on the job; training not transferable to other employers.
TIER TWO JOBS: SOME SPECIFIC SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE OR EXPERIENCE REQUIRED *(in one or more of these categories)*	
Literacy/More advanced academic skills and content knowledge	The ability to read and possibly write prose and documents and perform arithmetic operations needed in entry-level jobs.
Technical skills and knowledge	Transferable abilities and information (e.g., typing, machine operation, hygienic food preparation) frequently acquired from a formal training program; sometimes credentialed.
Tier Two soft skills	More advanced soft skills, both cognitive ("higher order" thinking skills such as problem solving) and social/interactive (such as teamwork).
Career advancement; broad-based knowledge of company/occupation/industry	Skills and knowledge not directly related to the completion of work tasks, but that provide an enhanced context for understanding one's job, making contributions to the firm, and advancing one's career.

More Complex and Demanding Low-Skill Jobs

The remaining jobs in the low-skill labor market—"Tier Two" jobs—all require the applicant to bring some specific skills to the job. An example comes from a factory we studied which draws its employees from the local neighborhood. No specific skills are required for entry-level jobs. However, employees who stay for a while and work out well might be taught to operate a simple machine. After that, as the employer explained, "If their reading levels are good, which many times they're not, they might be sent to the warehouse to pull orders." Pulling warehouse orders requires basic English literacy, making it a Tier Two job. As a broad generalization, new hires into these jobs might earn as much as $8.00 or $9.00/hour ($16,000 to $18,000/year at full-time) or as little as the minimum wage.

These more complex jobs can require one or more kinds of skills and knowledge. While this is a widely diverse category of jobs, requiring different levels and mixes of skills, they are linked by their distinction from the simpler Tier One jobs, which require none of these particular kinds of skills and knowledge:

- Literacy/academic skills and content knowledge;
- Technical skills and knowledge;
- More advanced soft skills;
- Job/career skills and knowledge; and
- Broad-based knowledge of company, occupation or industry.

In the following pages, we provide rough estimates of the gaps between skill requirements in Tier Two entry-level jobs and the skill levels of the welfare population. These estimates, which are meant to establish order of magnitude rather than precise percentages, are summarized in Figure 1-3.

Figure 1-3

Requirements to Enter, Stay and Advance in Tier Two Jobs	Welfare Recipients Possessing Skills Needed in Tier Two Jobs
Literacy/Academic skills and content knowledge	Two-thirds have reading/math levels between seventh and twelfth grades.
Technical skills and knowledge	Perhaps 5 to 10 percent have credentials or work experience recognized by other employers.
Tier Two soft skills	Few have higher level cognitive skills.
Job/career skills and knowledge **Broad-based knowledge of company, occupation, or industry**	Very few.

Literacy/Basic Academic Skills

The most common and basic skill required in Tier Two jobs is English literacy—most fundamentally, simple reading ability. Increasing numbers of jobs, however, require more complex reading skills, the ability to write sentences or paragraphs, and/or simple arithmetic skills. For example, several employers interviewed by JFF said their housekeeping and maintenance staff had to be able to read and understand usage directions for potentially hazardous cleaning chemicals. Some Tier Two jobs require licenses or certificates, for which literacy is needed to study texts and take exams. Advancement in even the low-skill labor market demands fairly sound basic academic skills. Moving beyond it to higher paying and higher skill jobs increasingly requires the ability to perform academic work at the community-college level.

Data on welfare recipients' educational backgrounds and qualifications are relatively plentiful but do not directly address the skill needs identified by employers (such as "sufficient reading to pull orders in the warehouse") or researchers

(such as "the ability to read paragraphs"). Recipients' literacy levels are clearly well below the average levels for U.S. adults.

Data from the 1991 caseload, for example, show that 11 percent of welfare mothers had an eighth-grade education or less; 35 percent had one to three years of high school; and 41 percent had four years of high school. Educational levels decline among longer-term recipients: 63 percent of those who had received AFDC for 60+ months in 1995 had less than a high school education, compared with 46 percent overall (Pavetti 1995). Analysis of basic skills test scores and AFDC and employment status for 25-year-old women found that women on AFDC performed much more poorly than their non-AFDC counterparts (Burtless 1995).[4] Of the women who had received AFDC in each of the preceding twelve months, 72 percent scored in the bottom quartile of the test, compared with 22 percent of the women who had not received any AFDC. Similarly, only 11 percent of the AFDC-receiving women were employed, compared with 77 percent of the women who had not received any AFDC in the preceding twelve months. A recent survey by Child Trends, Inc. found that more than one-half of the surveyed welfare recipients had reading and math levels below the seventh-grade level (Center for Law and Social Policy [CLASP] 1996a).

Technical Skills and Knowledge

The term, "technical skills," generally refers to skills that are specific and involve interaction with technology. Examples include typing, welding, and computer programming, as opposed to reading or teamwork.

Technical skills can be acquired either at the workplace, through on-the-job training, or off-the-job, from training courses delivered by public educational or training institutions or private training vendors. Technical skills are more valuable if they are transferable—that is, if various employers recognize them and will pay higher wages for them. Most training provided in off-the-job courses is intended to have value for a range of employers (though poor program quality can limit that value).

How transferable is workplace training provided to low-skill employees? This question is important for low-skill welfare recipients because new welfare policies are, in effect, substituting employment for traditional education and training services. Fewer off-site learning programs will be funded with welfare dollars; and time at work will make it harder for recipients to take advantage of basic education or technical-skill training courses.

Economic theory suggests that it is not in an employer's interest to provide training that will appeal to other employers. Training is expensive, and providing transferable skills can make it easier for employees to look for another job that pays higher wages, making it difficult for employers to recoup their training investment in higher productivity or quality (Klerman and Karoly 1995).

Research on the connection between training and wages for low-skill workers supports the hypothesis that employer-provided training tends to be firm-specific and not easily transferable. Studies by Tufts University economist Lisa Lynch (1992; 1993) conclude that training provided by employers to young adults without a college degree only results in wage increases for workers who stay with the employer who provided the training. Training from a previous employer did not significantly raise current wages for this population, while off-the job training provided by vendors or proprietary schools significantly improved wages, particularly for females.

The dichotomy between transferable and non-transferable skills may not be as firm as it initially appears. Employers reward the credentials, provided by outside institutions, but these may or may not reflect the mastery of relevant skills. At the same time, few employers generate their own credentials which penalizes workers who learned their skills on the job. Employees may be learning potentially transferable skills—but they have no help in

[4] Burtless uses data for the Armed Forces Qualification Test, which measures arithmetic reasoning, numerical operations, word knowledge, and paragraph comprehension.

identifying those skills or documenting them in ways that other employers would understand or reward. (This opportunity is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.)

Data on welfare recipients' technical skills are limited, although data on education and work experience suggest low levels of technical skills for the great majority. Some small percentage may have actual or potential transferable skills. Welfare recipients who completed formal training programs through JTPA but failed to obtain employment may have developed some technical skills (though the match between skills taught and skills employers expect may have been weak) (Bloom et al. 1994; U.S. DoL 1995). Some welfare recipients have relatively extensive work histories, approximately 6 percent of the job-ready caseload, according to one recent survey (CLASP 1996a). It is possible that somewhere around 5 percent of the caseload has technical skills that employers would recognize as valuable. The number might be driven somewhat higher if potential transferable skills could be credentialed.

Tier Two Soft Skills

The low-skill labor market is changing. There is evidence that employers are requiring increasingly high levels of soft skills from applicants. Moss and Tilly (1991) believe that employers generally stress social or soft skills more than technical skills. Packer and Wirt (1992) argue that "occupations with high requirements for cognitive skills . . . grew faster than occupations with low requirements for skills in these areas." Holzer (1996) found a "relatively high frequency of cognitive and social task performance" requirements in his analysis of jobs not requiring a college degree.

The impact of this development on welfare recipients could hardly be beneficial. As the evidence cited above suggests, work-related soft skills are weak among welfare recipients, even at the basic level. Higher-level soft skills are likely to be even weaker. Rebecca Maynard (1995b), for example, concludes that "few" welfare recipients have higher-level cognitive skills. Weak basic academic skills and teamwork skills are also likely to limit welfare recipients' problem-solving and reasoning abilities.

If jobs are requiring more soft skills, and more sophisticated levels of those skills, the barriers to getting and keeping relatively low-skill jobs may be increasing. Assessing the extent to which increasing soft skill requirements explain the growing wage gap between black and white men, Moss and Tilly (1991: 32) offer a thesis that might also apply to welfare recipients. They found that the view of many managers that black men lack these soft skills helps explain black men's growing disadvantage in labor markets. They attribute these views to "partly stereotype, partly cultural gap, and partly an accurate perception of the skills that many less-educated black men bring to the labor market."

Job/Career Advancement Skills

Based on JFF's experience with work preparation programs, we include two additional types of skills and knowledge often ignored in other discussions of this topic. These are: job or career advancement skills, and broad-based exposure to knowledge about the company, occupation, or industry.

Job or career advancement skills include the ability to get and use career information (including related educational requirements and opportunities for financial aid), seek mentors, develop and use networks, engage in informational interviews, and so on. These are the same skills and information that managers and professionals learn and use in career seminars, networking groups, and in the daily routines of their work. While these are quite useful to employees, employers have little incentive to promote them in their workers. These "navigational" skills make it easier for employees to find better work elsewhere or to negotiate a better position or wage package internally.

This set of skills and knowledge is becoming increasingly important to workers at all job levels as employers abandon traditional arrangements that offered long-term jobs and advancement in exchange for loyalty. Welfare recipients and other low-wage workers are extremely vulnerable in this new world of employment expectations. As job security erodes and publicly funded "safety nets" weaken, they will have increasing need for skills and information to help them help themselves. But

most welfare recipients are isolated from the social networks that managers and professionals use to get jobs and advance careers. Few have access to accurate career and labor market information.

Virginia Schein's interviews (1995) with welfare recipients from a variety of backgrounds document a radical disconnection from the working mainstream: "These women had limited knowledge about the range of occupations and jobs potentially open to them, even within the traditional female occupations." This was also true of the women's mothers, few of whom had been employed and most of whom had worked only a very limited range of jobs (factory work, waitressing, care-giving). According to Schein: "Most of their jobs were leading nowhere." There were no avenues of opportunity and no organizations to spot talent, provide training, or develop potential.

In jobs for which starting at the bottom usually means staying at the bottom, moving up is especially difficult and requires skill and knowledge about how to navigate a workplace. Consider the example of Dee Dee Stanback, a welfare mother with a tenth-grade education when she took her first job as a minimum-wage dishwasher in 1979. Today, Stanback is the manager of a large and popular restaurant. Here is how she says she did it (Stanback 1996). About a year after getting the dishwasher's job,

> *I moved up to a cook's position. After that, I started waitressing. With every new job, I acquired new skills and became a more valuable worker. Every time a new position opened up, I applied for it and got it. I think I've held just about every job there is to hold in a restaurant. ...Those first few jobs may not have paid much. But they taught me the skills everyone needs to get ahead: personal responsibility, a commitment to excellence...*

Mary Ann Moore, the Cabrini Green resident mentioned earlier, has found a relatively well-paying job for a woman leaving welfare. Her experience underscores the importance of these "navigational" skills (DeParle 1994):

> *At $8 an hour, she is the highest-paid among the kitchen's eight workers; it's the highest wage of her life. ..."She's a self-starter," says the shelter's director, Tyrone Staggers, who ranks her in the top 5 of the 50 or so workers he has supervised. Moore got her foot in the door when she landed a part-time job as a food aide in a Head Start program housed in the same building. She was earning $5.15 an hour...[and] attended a city college course, which earned her a food and sanitation license. She befriended the shelter's longtime cook, gaining stove-side lessons and a chance to fill in during open shifts. When the cook retired, Moore gained the job.*

Even from this short description, it is easy to identify Moore's formal and informal savvy about food service occupations as well as her skill in career advancement methods: knowing that a license was needed and how to obtain one, including attending a formal course; the willingness and ability to get stove-side lessons from the previous cook; and the alertness to build up experience through filling in for the cook during open shifts, for example. Most welfare recipients could benefit greatly from acquiring and strengthening these important skills.

Broader Knowledge of the Company/Occupation/Industry

The final skill development category we discuss here focuses on an individual's knowledge of aspects of the firm or industry which, while not directly relevant to one's specific job tasks, can improve one's understanding of the competitive environment within which the firm operates, the dynamics of employment and opportunity, and other contextual information. In the school-to-work movement and the related efforts to reform vocational education, emphasis has been placed on instruction not just in a particular job or set of job tasks, but in "all aspects of the industry," defined to include issues of management, finance, planning, technology, labor relations, and health and safety.

There is some evidence that employers are beginning to see the value of broader exposure to industry issues and dynamics, particularly in relation to customer and client relations and expectations (see Chapter 2). As one employer told us, "I wish my workers had a better grasp of the big picture."

For the welfare population, such knowledge and perspective is sorely lacking—and might help them

make wiser decisions about employment and education. In 1995, a survey of residents of Flint, Michigan, long dominated by General Motors auto production, found wide variation in the economic perceptions of welfare recipients compared to those of the general population (Twenty First Century Task Force 1995). While 80 percent of Flint residents surveyed agreed that "the days when a person with little skill can find a good paying job in the factory are gone forever," less than half of welfare recipients concurred. Two out of three welfare recipients in Flint felt that "all this talk about competing in a global economy is baloney," compared to one in three among the general population. In large part because of their weak attachment to today's labor market and workplaces, welfare recipients' perceptions of the economy and its demands put them at a disadvantage in the labor market.

Summary: Welfare Recipients and the Low-Skill Labor Market

Not surprisingly, the welfare population as a whole has serious skill deficiencies which, alone and independent of other non-skill obstacles, stand in the way of many recipients' being able to get, keep, or advance in a job. In this chapter, based on available evidence, we generated broad estimates on the education and skill levels of welfare recipients. We differentiated between those who lack the rudimentary entry-level soft skills needed in any job and those who are capable of holding a job, but need stronger academic, technical, "navigational" and/or soft skills to be able to advance out of entry-level jobs. We compared this profile to the expectations employers appear to have for low-skill, low-wage workers in different "tiers" of the low wage job market. The evidence strongly suggests that the overwhelming majority of welfare recipients need to strengthen or acquire a range of skills that employers expect and value if they are to escape poverty and dependency.

This overview provides the backdrop for our assessment of the potential significance of work-based learning for welfare recipients. It provides evidence of gaps that exist and need to be filled. From this analysis, we can start to assess the usefulness of different approaches for increasing the learning opportunities available to welfare recipients in paid jobs and unpaid work placements. In the next chapter, we explore the nature of training and learning opportunities in low-skill worksites. Through a combination of evidence from an employer survey and the research literature, we assess both opportunities for and limits to work-based learning in low-skill workplaces.

CHAPTER TWO

Employer Training Practices for Workers in Low-Skill Jobs

Is it reasonable to imagine more widespread and formalized work-based learning in low-skill workplaces, of a kind of quality that could help welfare recipients improve skill and knowledge levels? Answering this question requires information on both current training and education practices in low-skill workplaces and employers' willingness to enhance the learning content of low-skill jobs. However, research on employer-provided training in low-skill workplaces is limited.

To develop a clearer understanding of these training practices, Jobs for the Future conducted a telephone survey of employers likely to hire welfare recipients. We probed two broad areas related to training: current practices and employer attitudes. We wanted to find out what kinds of training employers currently provide employees in low-skill jobs. We also wanted to probe how receptive employers would be to providing training that could address skill and knowledge needs of welfare recipients.

Jobs for the Future surveyed 23 employers in Milwaukee and 20 in Cleveland.[1] We collected information for a total of 66 jobs for which additional hires were likely in the near future and for which applicants would not need any postsecondary education. The employers represent industries in each city that have recently hired welfare recipients—predominantly manufacturing, hospitality and leisure, and health care. The main occupations represented were manufacturing laborers, food service workers, housekeepers, and nursing assistants and aides. The interviewer spoke with the person responsible for hiring and training or, if a firm split those responsibilities, the person with the most general knowledge about those issues. The average survey took 25 minutes to complete.

What Training Do Employers Provide Low-Skill Workers?

The employers we surveyed reported that they try to avoid hiring anyone who lacks basic job-holding skills and discipline. New hires who lacked these basic attitudes and behaviors would be terminated, according to most respondents. A few employers have established a sequence of discipline policies to alert employees to unsatisfactory performance in time to change, and some use simple coaching methods to support employee progress. But, as a group, these employers provide little support for individuals who cannot function effectively in a work

[1] A detailed description of the employer survey is presented in the appendices. It should be noted that in both Cleveland and Milwaukee, unemployment was quite low at the time of the survey: 3.6 percent in Cleveland and around 5 percent in Milwaukee. This may account for some of the relative receptivity to new or enhanced skill development strategies: employers may be having a particularly hard time finding qualified entry-level workers. Had we conducted this survey in more depressed communities or at a different point in the business cycle, employer responses may have differed.

environment. Not one incorporates basic job-holding skills in the training of entry-level workers. A number of employers said they could not even imagine it. As one noted: "How could you train somebody who won't even come to work?"

All the employers surveyed provide some training to newly hired low-skill employees. A smaller subgroup provides additional upgrade training for employees who have been on the job for a while. New-hire training is designed to show employees how to do their jobs and to get them "up to speed" as quickly as possible. It is during new-hire training that employees have their chance to learn what they need to do to keep their job.

Training for employees who have been on the job for a while is different. To the extent that employers provide it, they use it to accommodate change—new equipment, product lines, quality requirements, and so on. Approximately one-third of the employers in the survey said they do not provide such training to workers in low-skill jobs, which they attributed primarily to the lack of change in their workplaces. Another one-third have provided such training, either intermittently (e.g., vendor training for new equipment) or selectively (e.g., "promising" entry-level employees given the opportunity to attend special training). The remaining third provide such training on an ongoing basis for all employees. One example comes from health care employers surveyed, all of whom provide required or recommended seminars for nursing assistants. Some of the most innovative work-based learning in low-skill workplaces is provided not in new-hire training, but in this upgrade or in-service training. However, only a minority of employers surveyed provided such learning opportunities for its employees in low-skill jobs.

The new-hire training provided by the employers we surveyed consisted almost exclusively of technical tasks and processes: how the machine should be operated, how the room should be cleaned, how a certain kind of food should be prepared, and so on. No other type of skill figured in the new-hire training of the employers we surveyed.

A surprising number of employers—about one-third—say they provide some exposure to "broader knowledge of the company and industry" through in-service training, so that low-skill employees understand more about the priorities of the company or the nature of the industry in which they work. The programs that were described by respondents were modest, but many appear to be both useful and something that could be built upon and expanded. A typical example, cited by several employers, is a periodic briefing by the CEO or other senior manager on changing customer requirements.

Otherwise, few employers provide training in the Tier Two skills and knowledge areas we have identified as critical for welfare recipients' success in the labor market (see Figure 1-1). None of the employers we surveyed provides literacy instruction for new hires. Only two make workplace literacy programs available to their employees, though a third employer is adding a program. While about one-third of the responding employers have tuition reimbursement programs, tuition reimbursement does not appear to be seen by employers as a means of encouraging the upgrading of literacy skills.[2]

With two exceptions, the employers we surveyed do not appear to provide technical-skill training that would transfer easily. In most cases, training is in specific routines used in that workplace: e.g., office procedures in letter formatting rather than typing skill development. Moreover, training for new hires is largely informal and undocumented. Few of the employers we surveyed were able to describe their technical skill training for new hires in any detail. Few of these workplaces had written documents describing the technical training routines and none issued credentials certifying skills learned. It is difficult for workers trained in this way to articulate their specific technical skills clearly to a prospective new employer.

Two exceptions, where transferable skills were clearly provided by employers, were identified by survey respondents. Some health care providers in both Milwaukee and Cleveland provide worksite training

[2] Among respondents who provide tuition reimbursement, this benefit is used infrequently for general skill development of low-skill workers. Employers consider it primarily a means for upgrading technical skills directly related to job performance.

to prepare employees for certification as nursing assistants. Employers apparently developed these in-house training programs in transferable skills to cope with two converging factors: a shortage of credentialed workers and increasing governmental regulation.[3]

The other exception is precision metal fabrication, an industry in which changing technology and waning student interest have led to the shutdown of trade schools that formerly taught the metal-fabrication skills employers wanted. Some employers have responded by developing in-house training for machine operators but this has made them vulnerable to "poaching" by other firms. As one metal fabrication employer told us: "I've actually had competitors call me up and say I have an excellent school here. That's why we walked away from hiring vocational students: we get them up to speed, and they move over to competitors who don't want to spend the money to teach these guys anything."

We anticipated that employers would emphasize more advanced soft skills—both cognitive and social/interactive—in part because recent research suggests that employers in low-skill workplaces consider these problem-solving and communication skills increasingly important (Holzer 1996; Moss and Tilly 1995). The surveyed employers, however, rarely referred to these soft skills when discussing training. Perhaps a quarter of the respondents said that customer service is important enough for them to provide in-service training in this area through management presentations and other means. However, none of the employers appear to train new employees in customer service skills. It may well be that the employers we surveyed rely on hiring, not training, to obtain the levels of soft skills they want in their entry-level workforce, just as they do for technical skills.

Although they were the exception, not the rule, some employers in our survey provided fairly comprehensive programs for their low-skill employees. Here is how one health care establishment summarized their career support program:

> *Yes, we have our company handbook and films… that give the facility history, philosophy, etc. Our company headquarters put it together. Twice a year, there is a convention at headquarters, a three-day, two-night affair, with all kinds of networking opportunities and hands-on knowledge about the company and where it's headed. Each one of our facilities takes a number of employees each time.*

Can Current Strategies Be Built Upon and Enhanced?

There is reason to hope that employer provision of training and learning opportunities for low-skill employees will grow in the coming years, in response to competitive pressures, changes in work organization, and new technologies. There are some trends in this direction, even though entry-level employees continue to receive a much smaller share of employer training investments than do professional and managerial workers.

On the one hand, employers in the JFF survey reported almost unanimously that they are satisfied with their training efforts for entry-level workers. This was particularly apparent in workplaces where jobs are quite low-skill and employers expect little change. One respondent reported, for example, "We don't do anything that involves skills here."

More promising, though, were responses to their plans for the future. One-quarter of the employers surveyed described plans to add more training for low-skill workers within the next three years. For example, a manufacturing firm is planning to move to high-tech methods and machines and will train its workforce in appropriate technical and soft skills. A health care provider is planning to hire a staff person to develop and coordinate training programs customized for the health care industry.

These responses are consistent with national trends. For example, *Training* magazine reported that between 1988 and 1991, training dedicated to front-line workers increased significantly—from an average of 34 hours in 1989 to 37 hours in 1991, continuing a trend that began in the early 1980s—

[3] One respondent's institution has just closed its program; perhaps the shortage is easing.

even while total training budgets in those recession years fell 5 percent (Campbell 1992).

This apparent receptivity to increased training at the low-skill end of the labor market provides support for strategies to enhance work-based learning. In what ways might employers be willing to add new activities and approaches to their current practices? Do some of the existing practices provide a potential "platform" for expanding work-based learning?

To answer this question, we collected information on the methods employers use to encourage learning on the job. In the absence of hard evaluation data, this information provides a sense of employer interest in and demand for various training practices. Moreover, such descriptions indicate the extent to which current skill development practices might be expanded or built upon to strengthen work-based learning.

Among the employers we surveyed, two ways of delivering learning on the job to new hires were by far the most common: *hands-on training* and *the buddy system*.

Slightly more than half the employers said they use a hands-on approach for teaching entry-level workers their jobs. This minimal form of instruction has been called the "do this, do that" approach or the "follow Joe around" method of training. The new hire is shown, briefly, how to do the job and is then assigned to start working, often at simple tasks. Fellow employees are on alert to help out if the new employee appears to be doing something wrong, but otherwise there is no attempt to separate the training from ongoing production. Here is a typical (and complete) description from the survey, explaining how new housekeepers are oriented to their job: "[The new housekeeper] is taken into a room and shown exactly what has to be done. There are maybe three to four days of special supervision."

About one-quarter of the responding employers said they use the buddy system, which they sometimes referred to as mentoring. Slightly more supportive and longer term than hands-on training, the buddy system pairs an experienced employee with a new hire for a specified period of time to show and explain how the job is done correctly.[4] Depending on the buddy's individual coaching and teaching skills, the new hire could acquire valuable information, rudimentary trouble-shooting expertise, a familiar face in a strange environment, and even a senior figure to consult when problems arise. Most employers surveyed stressed that the buddy's mandate is purely job-specific and definitely short term. However, two employers reported establishing formal programs to train buddies, and two said they encouraged buddies to provide moral support and general acculturation as well as help in the technical aspects of the job.

Most employers supplement the hands-on or buddy approaches with additional strategies. The most common are: employee orientations and handbooks (a general introduction, perhaps to company policy, perhaps to the workplace); written instructions and training manuals; skill checklists; and training videos. In a few instances, employers we interviewed have arranged these elements into a coordinated program.

There is obviously no way to assess the effectiveness of these strategies from our survey. However, different approaches can be measured against criteria for effective learning at work that have been developed by cognitive theorists who study workplaces (see Vickers 1996). In effective programs:

- There is a clear pathway to expertise—i.e., the worker is shown the difference between expert and acceptable performance and how to move toward expertise.
- Training is separated from production—the value of instructional lessons is allowed at times to supersede the demands of production; qualified individuals are assigned responsibility for training; appropriate policies, materials, and time-periods have been established.
- Support is available to maintain the new employees through difficult adjustments, in terms of both the work assignment itself and the social environment of the workplace.

[4] The other one-quarter of respondents includes employers that have non-typical approaches to training (such as relying on videotapes) plus the few that have well-planned, comprehensive training programs.

- Material to be learned is defined and articulated clearly; expectations for employees, and how they can meet them, are explicit.
- Material to be learned is presented in a context where it can be immediately applied. Learning opportunity is provided when it is needed, when workers are most receptive and motivated.[5]

With regard to the last criterion—using the workplace as context—employer-provided training in low-skill workplaces should be effective because almost all of it takes place "on the floor." Very few employers attempted, however, to take advantage of the workplace setting to develop contextualized training materials and strategies. Experience on the floor was considered sufficient. One notable exception was a supervisor who developed a detailed training manual for her employees that addressed their work responsibilities by topic. She met with them weekly to introduce new topics and review progress.

In general, we found that the more sophisticated and intensive training strategies were used least frequently by employers we surveyed. Effective strategies require more time off production, more preparation time and thought about both learning and instruction, and longer term supports. They tend to be both more costly and more complex to manage. It is not surprising that twice as many employers reported using the minimal hands-on approach compared to the more intensive buddy system. Low-cost strategies (such as "give written instructions") were frequently cited supplements to training, while more complex and resource-consuming strategies (such as detailed training manuals) were rare.

Based on our survey responses and interviews in the field, we believe that some practices used in low-skill workplaces today can serve as a solid "platform" for expanding and enhancing employer-provided learning opportunities. Some employers we interviewed have neither a set of current practices nor the interest to step up their on the job training efforts, and others lack either the learning infrastructure or the commitment to training and development. However, a significant minority of the employers we surveyed has the building blocks for—and shows some initial interest in—more effective and strategic investments in its low-skill workers. As has already been noted, about one-third of the respondents not only recognized the concept of encouraging broader knowledge of the company and industry, but also said they had instituted measures to promote broader knowledge. Almost all the responding employers recognized the concept of mentoring, and a good number of them said they use it, in the form of the buddy system.

Mentor-like in structure and possessing the potential for relatively easy enhancement, the buddy system is perhaps the most promising place to start. A second opportunity is the use of skill checklists by some employers we surveyed to monitor employee performance for retention, compensation, and promotion. We also identified two industry-specific examples of a potential platform for expanded effort: (1) the "official briefings" that a number of manufacturing firms use to keep workers apprised of customer requirements; and (2) health care firms' practice of presenting regular seminars for employees, including workers in low-skill jobs. Firms that have a training coordinator for employees in low-skill jobs, and have instituted a sequence of disciplinary policies that help employees improve job performance, are more likely to be candidates for expanded work-based learning strategies.

What are the Implications for Work-Based Learning in Welfare Programs?

Would employers make special efforts to augment their training to help welfare recipients? We asked

[5] The employers we surveyed gave little detail about either the content or the methods they use to train new hires. In part, this is a result of the limitations of phone surveys. In some cases, we interviewed managers with no direct knowledge of the low-skill work in their firm. In most cases, however, it was clear that the respondent had a good grasp of job tasks and processes—but still could not describe the specifics of the training delivery. This is not surprising. Most training of the low-skill variety is of the "follow Joe around" variety. While we imagine from the interviews that respondents could show us how they train, they had difficulty articulating and describing this "tacit" knowledge.

each employer to imagine that his or her firm had hired one or more welfare recipients, and we probed for the firm's relative receptivity to providing training for recipients with different skill needs (basic job-holding skills; technical skills to perform work assignments; and the skills needed for advancement in the company). We also asked them whether various incentives (such as low cost training materials and tax credits) would make it easier to get the company to approve the training.

Employers were surprisingly receptive—at least in these non-binding phone interviews—to the idea of providing some special training to welfare recipients who enter their workforce, including training to improve work discipline, technical skills, or knowledge about what is required to advance in the company. A significant minority of respondents felt that it would be "easy" to convince their companies to provide some additional support at the outset to help welfare recipients succeed.

Not surprisingly, employers appear most likely to provide special training to welfare recipients in the area of job tasks and processes, the area in which they already consider themselves responsible and competent. About half the respondents answered positively to this question. Employers would be far less likely to provide extra training to welfare recipients with poor job-holding skills or to welfare recipients who lack the broader skills and knowledge needed to advance. Even so, one-quarter of respondents felt it would be easy to convince the company to provide extra support in these areas. Even discounting respondents who felt obliged to give the answer they thought "correct," this is still a positive sign.

At the same time, employers were emphatic that any additional efforts would have to be of minimal cost and hassle to the employer. Enhancements of current work-based learning for low-skill workers would have to be: low cost; relatively simple to implement; have small impact on company resources such as supervisors' time; and be justifiable in terms of increased productivity, lower turnover, higher quality, or other production measures.

Can such efforts be designed? And how likely are they to be able to motivate and provide valuable knowledge and skill development to welfare recipients? We address these questions in the next two chapters. First, we assess promising and cautionary lessons from school-to-work efforts. We then turn to a proposal, for ways that welfare-to-work programs can incorporate and expand opportunities for work-based learning.

CHAPTER THREE

Work-Based Learning Strategies: Lessons From School-to-Work

For the past decade, welfare reform proposals have increasingly focused on work as the vehicle for helping low-skill and low-motivation recipients become more self-reliant. During this same period, there has been a burst of experimentation in other policy arenas with education and training strategies that emphasize work experience as a lever for improved learning. Some of these efforts have been in the area of adult literacy and basic education. Another important area of innovation has been in school-to-work programs linking high school students with employers.

In this chapter, we focus on lessons that Jobs for the Future and others have learned in the school-to-work field. Our goal is to draw out implications for the design and implementation of the work component of welfare programs, emphasizing three core design elements of school-to-work: workplace mentoring; contextual learning and instruction; and skill credentialing.

The chapter concludes with a close look at important factors that limit the immediate transferability of these school-to-work "technologies" to welfare programs, including:

1. Differences between employer expectations of and demands on in-school youth and entry-level adult workers;
2. Differences in motivation between school-to-work participants and welfare recipients; and
3. The importance of the school in ensuring quality work-based learning in school-to-work programs.

Policymakers and program designers will have to take these factors into account when adapting the lessons and methods of school-to-work for welfare work programs.

The Power of Integrating Work and Learning

In recent years, education and training policy and practice have emphasized two learning strategies for improving individual motivation and preparation for adult responsibility and careers. These are: (1) active and applied instructional approaches; and (2) the use of the workplace and work experience as a core element of a learning program.

In adult literacy and training programs, there is growing evidence of the power of contextual learning in helping lower-skilled individuals learn and advance. Thomas Sticht (1987), a cognitive psychologist, tested the effectiveness of an instructional method he called "functional context instruction" for the U.S. Armed Forces to help new recruits learn reading, writing, and mathematics. A control group was trained in the traditional way: several weeks of "up front"

literacy classes before entering job-related military training. A second group received literacy and induction (i.e., job) training simultaneously, using contextualized materials drawn from the specific work assignments. The experimental group had superior literacy gains and made them faster, leading Sticht to conclude that integrated workplace literacy instruction is significantly more effective than typical "up-front" adult basic education classes.

Additional evidence comes from the job training field. One of the most successful job training programs in terms of improving the employment and earnings prospects of disadvantaged individuals has been the Center for Employment and Training (CET) in San Jose, California (U.S. DoL, 1995). CET provides relatively short-duration training (3 to 6 months) to a population of which about 65 percent are high school dropouts. The program emphasizes close connections with the local labor market and recruitment of staff with experience in industry. CET's training courses are designed to provide participants specific skills that are in demand in the labor market—and courses are changed as employer demand shifts. In addition, CET's model is built upon the integration of basic education with vocational skill-building in an environment simulating real work settings. Instead of classroom instruction for academic skills, students improve their basic skills in the context of job training. In two rigorous evaluations, researchers found impressive earnings gains for CET graduates: participants in one experiment had an unprecedented $6,000 earnings improvement in the third and fourth years after their program participation—more than 40 percent higher than their control counterparts.

The school-to-work movement also emphasizes the importance of integrating high quality academic learning with work experience and job-related learning. School-to-work programs (and the federal School To Work Opportunities Act passed in 1994) emphasize three "integrations":

- Academic and technical learning;
- School- and work-based learning; and
- Secondary and postsecondary schooling.

School-to-work initiatives emphasize and incorporate high academic standards, work experience, the power of experiential learning, the combination of work and classroom-based learning, the importance of adult mentoring relationships, vertical linkages and smoother transitions between different educational opportunities and long-term involvement with and supports for young people. By bringing schools, employers, postsecondary educational institutions, and other community institutions into new partnerships, school-to-work programs try to change both the pedagogy and the context for learning for participating students. Many advocates of school-to-work or school-to-career efforts see it having great potential as a high school reform strategy that can improve student learning and raise performance to high standards (Goldberger and Kazis 1995; Stern et al. 1995).

The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (1996), a multi-sector group committed to raising the quality of schooling in six San Francisco Bay Area counties, defines its school-to-career approach in these terms:

> *Organizing most or all high school students' education around careers or occupations (or other engaging themes related to the world outside school) can bring coherence to the high school curriculum which traditionally offers unrelated academic, technical and enrichment classes. As a strategy for high school reform, school to career can help build new, high interest curriculum, give teachers exciting opportunities for working in teams, and guide needed organizational changes. At the same time, school to career with its emphasis on work-based and other forms of experiential learning, offers clear direction for partnerships with the community, especially cooperating employers.*

Early evidence on school-to-work programs, while tentative, is encouraging (Stern et al. 1995; U.S. Congress 1995; Kopp et al. 1995). Studies of various school-to-work models find that these efforts appear to:

- Motivate traditionally underserved students to stay in school;
- Have a positive impact on postsecondary enrollment;
- Improve preparation for and access to jobs; and

- Strengthen participating young people's self-perceptions and career aspirations.

School-to-work approaches appear to be especially effective with disadvantaged youth. Career academies in California and Philadelphia, designed specifically to serve at-risk students, have demonstrated positive results on attendance, grades, and graduation rates (Stern et al. 1992). The three-year dropout rate among students who entered the California programs as sophomores was only 7.3 percent, half that of a comparison group (Dayton et al. 1989). Encouraging results have also begun to emerge from studies of Career Magnet schools in New York City, from more intensive youth apprenticeship programs in Wisconsin and Michigan, and from school-to-work efforts in Boston and other cities.

Lessons from School-to-Work: Three Key Work-Based Learning Strategies

Most school-to-work models incorporate (or strive toward) three design elements that involve work experience and employer involvement as part of a learning program. These are: (1) mentoring relationships with adults at the workplace; (2) contextual learning that uses work experiences as part of an active, experiential pedagogy; and (3) credentialing of work-related skills demonstrated at the workplace. (See Figure 3-1.)

FIGURE 3-1: WORK-BASED LEARNING STRATEGIES

Mentoring refers to caring relationships between a capable adult and a less experienced person that both provide emotional support and facilitate development (occupational, intellectual, personal, social). School-to-work programs tend to structure mentoring relationships for regular interaction over an extended time.

Contextual learning and instruction builds from the view articulated by John Dewey that "there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (Weinbaum and Rogers 1995: 3). As applied to the work-based component of school-to-work, it refers to the use of actual work situations to provide occasions for instruction and application of academic, social, and technical skills and knowledge.

Credentialing refers to the process of defining competencies central to the performance of a task or job, then assessing an individual's performance vis-à-vis these competencies and issuing a document attesting to mastery of the competencies. The credential's portability is a function of the number of employers who recognize the document and value the competencies it measures.

The following pages summarize the way each is used in school-to-work programs and assess the potential for their "transfer" to the work component of welfare programs.

Mentoring

There is growing consensus in youth policy that relationships with caring and competent adults are critically important to the success of young people. In long-term studies of at-risk children in Hawaii, youth who overcame adversity had the solid support of an adult other than their parents (Walker and Freedman 1996). A recent study of two dozen disadvantaged youth who made it to college also concluded that the presence of an adult mentor was the most important factor contributing to the ability to persevere and triumph (Levine and Nidiffer 1996).

Mentoring is a basic element of the work component of school-to-work programs, and the federal School To Work Opportunities Act specifies that work-based learning shall include it. Mentoring is perhaps the most common core element in the design of work-based learning components of school-to-work initiatives.

Informal mentoring has long been a feature of workplace culture—particularly as a cornerstone of the "old boy network" (Freedman and Baker 1995). In the late 1970s, in response to concerns about the "glass ceiling" in corporate America, mentoring initiatives for women and minority professionals became popular at major U.S. firms. During the 1980s, a new wave of mentoring programs began to target young people in poverty, first in school and community settings and then in programs linking youth to the workplace.

The Office of Technology Assessment's study (1995) of work-based learning suggests that mentoring can play an important role in learning on-the-job and can provide an important source of support to mentees. OTA lists fourteen kinds of assistance a workplace mentor can provide, including acquainting less-experienced workers with the formal rules and informal norms of the workplace, inculcating positive attitudes and work habits, and providing empathy, support, and encouragement when difficulties are encountered. Freedman and Baker note that mentors can be particularly helpful to school-to-work students who differ in some way (race, gender, class, language) from the majority of workers in a particular workplace, enabling them to deal with feelings of insecurity and not belonging. Mentors can help bridge cultural gaps that make it difficult for students from diverse cultural backgrounds to "read" workplace culture and norms and adapt to them.

There is some debate about the ability of supervisors or case workers, who exercise disciplinary power over individual workers or recipients, to be effective mentors (see Freedman and Baker 1995). Jobs for the Future advocates that students be encouraged to develop a mentoring relationship with someone other than their supervisor. In many workplace situations, a student might need advice and support from someone less immediately responsible for their evaluation.

School-to-work efforts generally seek to ensure that each student can rely on at least one adult at the workplace. In some school-to-work programs, students are assigned mentors. In others, they select their own mentors as natural relationships form. Many programs blend the two, assigning an initial temporary mentor. As students become more acclimated to the workplace, they are encouraged to form relationships with mentors of their choosing.

One way to encourage greater informal workplace mentoring is to work with employer personnel to develop their mentoring skills. Another is to focus on participating young people, helping them learn the valuable "navigational" skill of how to seek out their own mentors.

For welfare recipients, as for young adults in school-to-work programs, mentoring can increase the likelihood of keeping a job and "navigating" the workplace. There is strong evidence that emotional support is highly valued by women on welfare and contributes to success in programs. In her oral history of welfare recipients, Virginia Schein (1995) documents the kinds of help that welfare recipients consider crucial to being able to bounce back and become more self-reliant. The most important help came from bosses and teachers who supported them at critical times in their lives, understanding and making allowances for crises such as sick children. Equally important was social support from job training program case workers who "made the difference and facilitated their success" by opening new windows of opportunity, enhancing their sense of self-esteem and self-worth, and being sources of emotional support and understanding.

The designers of Project Match in Chicago have identified the "development of a caring trusting relationship between the participant and her counselor [as] the most important factor in effective service delivery at Project Match" (Herr and Wagner with Majeske 1995). From their experience, they have identified three strategies that build this relationship: counselors "do what they say they'll do," they listen to clients' concerns even if they do not

appear to be directly related to school or work, and they help clients whether they have an appointment or just drop in.

Although supportive caseworkers are critically important, they cannot substitute for work-based mentors. Most caseworkers know very little about work and employment issues or about workplaces. A recent study of Oregon's Post-Employment Services Demonstration project noted that staff in the "job-specific problem solving" component had no experience dealing with employers and employment issues. Typical welfare program staff, whose responsibility ends at the time of job placement, are likely to be even less knowledgeable. The program assessment concluded (Herr, Halpern and Wagner 1995):

> *[M]ost of the retention workers are tentative about contacting employers. ...[Demonstration] staff have not had formal training in how to bring employers into the retention process. Unfortunately, there are currently no curricula or training materials available in this area, mostly because there are only a few programs in the country that provide this kind of assistance.*

Not surprisingly, most welfare recipients are even less knowledgeable about workplaces than their caseworkers. Project Match (Herr, Halpern and Wagner 1995), which maintains contact with clients who are working, has concluded that:

> *Some clients may have trouble recognizing work problems: many welfare recipients have so little experience in the workforce that they often do not realize they're not performing well before it's too late and they're fired. And even if a supervisor gives plenty of warning, they may not understand how serious the situation is.*

Mentoring has proven effective at providing this type of work-based learning (which can mean the difference between keeping and losing a job) in school-to-work settings. There are several effective ways to promote mentoring for welfare recipients. One is training supervisors and/or co-workers in essential mentoring skills (see Chapter 4 for specific recommendations). Another is training welfare recipients how to find their own mentors. This training should include both the "how to" of finding a mentor, and the understanding that seeking help from informed people at the worksite is legitimate and essential.

Contextual Learning and Instruction

For many learners, abstract and passive classroom learning poses significant obstacles. "Learning through doing" that is embedded in more active and experiential instructional strategies is often more effective. This emphasis on "contextual learning" is at the heart of efforts to reconnect schooling and work. Its roots go back at least to philosopher and educator John Dewey at the turn of the century.

Reacting against the rigid curriculum of his day, Dewey argued that a curriculum and pedagogy that address students' daily lives and experiences could avoid the contrived nature of school curricula and materials which, in their abstraction, are often "formal, superficial, and cold" (Grubb 1995: 13-14). For Dewey, the most effective way to focus instruction and learning was to educate *through*, rather than *for*, occupations. This view was motivated in part by a belief that such education "is a foe to passivity" and fosters active learning and the integration of learning and doing.

While Dewey's views on contextual learning had little impact on American high school education, recent research on how people learn has revived interest in contextual learning tied to work and the "real-world" as a better way for many to learn complex skills. Lauren Resnick of the University of Pittsburgh drew the following contrasts between school learning and real-world learning in an influential 1987 article. School learning emphasizes the individual, thought that is independent of tools, and learning that is dependent upon symbols. In contrast, real-world learning builds on socially shared experiences, thinking shaped by and engaged with tools, learning engaged with objects and events, and situation-specific learning (Resnick 1987). One implication of the new cognitive research is that schools should become more like workplaces and workplaces more like schools.

Cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of sequencing three distinct instructional methods: modeling, coaching, and exploration (Collins et al.

1989). A group of Canadian educators and cognitive scientists (Simon et al. 1991) has written that in every job and workplace—even the most low-skill and routine—some amount of generic "working knowledge" must be learned that is important to success in the labor market. This includes the language of work, workplace norms and unwritten rules, and the frame of reference used to determine good and bad work. Believing that "the central educational question in the workplace is not whether rich forms of knowledge are in use in the environment, but whether and how newcomers...get access to that knowledge," Simon and his colleagues have developed strategies and curricular materials for using the workplace as the context for learning about work and one's strategies for succeeding on the job.

Margaret Vickers' (1996) research for this project, based in part on observations of a group of school-to-work students in Boston and Cambridge over a two-year period, underscores the potential of work-based contextual learning. She concludes that the students learned a broad array of skills and behaviors important for new workforce entrants, particularly for those who have been fairly isolated from the labor market. These included: specific workplace skills and standard operating procedures, a facility for using relevant workplace technologies, and generic workplace-related skills (often referred to as the "SCANS" skills, after the Department of Labor Commission that generated and codified them). Students gained a more positive attitude about themselves, their ability to learn, and their capacity to be useful. They also became more willing to learn—and they developed an appreciation of the role learning plays in work. Vickers cites the example of students who, prior to their work-based learning experience, had not understood that intellectual skills are important in hospital work. In a science classroom they said, "We don't want to know this stuff. We just want jobs."

> *A week later these students started their hospital internships. From then on, their classroom teacher observed a new interest in learning the anatomy and physiology underlying the work they were doing at the hospital. By situating knowledge in a realistic setting, the internships created a "need-to-know" mentality in the students.*[1]

Another example of contextual learning in youth programming comes from an enriched summer youth employment program designed and tested by the Center for Human Resources at Brandeis University (1993). The design employed Thomas Sticht's functional context instruction and emphasized the integration of work and learning, with the major learning activities taking place on the job. The program was built around specific projects that groups of young people, assisted by a crew leader, researched, planned, implemented and evaluated. Crew leaders helped participants focus on academic, interpersonal, occupational, and navigational skills—and how they might improve them once the summer was over.

The Massachusetts Office of School-to-Work Transition supported the implementation of a version of this model in the summers of 1994 and 1995. Public school teachers acted as the "crew leaders" for this Summer of Work and Learning. Along with their crews, teachers spent 60 percent or more of their time at a worksite (mostly private-sector companies, including hospitals, insurance companies, and manufacturers). Teacher/leaders helped students adapt to the worksite, provided supplemental education/training to meet job needs, helped resolve work-related conflicts, and made worksite supervisors' jobs easier. Participating students, most of whom met JTPA standards for at-risk, had to make a presentation of their project to an audience, which frequently included senior managers from the worksite.

Employers, teachers, and students were all positive in their assessment of the model, and anecdotes of new-found motivation and accomplishment abound. For example, one group of seriously disadvantaged girls who started the summer by throwing a stink bomb at their teacher ended by creating a set of puzzle

[1] Vickers' one criticism of the work-based learning experiences she observed concerned weakness in the area of subject-matter knowledge, which she attributed to the absence of curriculum materials "that articulate concrete experience and subject-matter knowledge" and to the fact that many supervisors lack an adequate theoretical grounding in their subject matter.

books for the pediatric ward of the hospital where they worked. They presented their work in a slide show to the hospital's president and senior management.

Using work to motivate and support learning also appears to be a useful tool in helping welfare recipients advance. Among participants in Project Match, a long-term demonstration project in the Cabrini Green housing project, rates of progress were much higher for those who chose work first than for those who chose education first. Why? "[I]t was only after experiencing low-paying, entry level jobs with few prospects for advancement that many participants came to understand in a visceral sense the link between school and work" (Herr and Halpern with Conrad 1991). Welfare recipients seem to respond similarly to students to work-based learning: people are more likely to apply themselves and to persevere when the knowledge matters in ways they understand directly.

There are undoubtedly a number of innovative grassroots efforts around the country providing work-based learning for welfare recipients, and further research on "best practice" in this area is warranted. In our limited employer survey, one respondent noted that his firm is already involved in a welfare program that ties learning on the job to extra supports and mentoring:

> *We are working with a [welfare-to-work program] right now. The program itself provides welfare recipients with their own supervisor and mentor during the first six months that they're here. They check in on them at least once a week, and provide additional training if it's needed.*

Credentialing of Skills

Credentialing of work-related skills is a third strategy widely advocated in the school-to-work field. Policy advocates (perhaps more than practitioners) argue that the way to improve the match between employer expectations and student performance is to make visible and obvious what employers want to see from new hires—and to make equally visible and understandable what job seekers know and can do. Credentialing of skills learned on the job, it is argued, would help employers and job seekers provide clearer signals to each other than the reliance on high school diplomas currently allows. As one recent report (MacAllum and Ma 1995) concluded:

> *Proponents and critical observers agree that achieving high performance depends equally on establishing new work systems and increasing the skill levels of workers—particularly entry-level workers. Therefore, developing effective mechanisms for identifying, assessing, documenting and certifying those skills is a critical prerequisite.*

In various reform visions for U.S. education and training systems, skill standards and competency-based credentials recognized and accepted by employers (and therefore portable) are seen as a vehicle for greater worker mobility, higher wages and more job opportunities; more efficient recruitment and screening; and clearer direction for those preparing to enter the workforce or make occupational or career changes (Hoachlander and Rahn 1994). This reform strand is embodied in the late 1980s SCANS Commission Report (supported by the U.S. Department of Labor), the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce's 1990 *America's Choice* report, the federal *Goals 2000* education legislation, and in the 1994 School To Work Opportunities Act. During the past several years, the federal government has tried to "jump start" national efforts to develop industry-recognized skill standards. These pilot efforts have yielded a range of models, some narrowly targeted to a single industry and some more generically applicable. However, this initiative is years away from results that can be applied easily and practically in schools or workplaces.[2] For school-to-work initiatives and, by extension, welfare-to-work programs, efforts to credential skills remain primarily a local matter.

As they have improvised ways to define, assess, and document workplace skills, a number of school-to-work and youth employment programs have created and implemented *learning plans*, which specify

[2] For a summary of current national efforts in skill standards and credentialing, see U.S. Department of Labor 1995.

what young people are expected to learn on the job and in which supervisors indicate how well they have performed in the workplace. Vocational education has long used detailed task checklists to assess student learning inside the classroom. These lists have tended to focus on technical tasks, and often quite narrowly, but the efforts have had the virtue of moving educators toward performance-based appraisals.

Despite their apparent comfort with the checklist approach to assessing technical skills, school-to-work employers have generally resisted adapting this approach for assessing students' competencies in the softer skills. Important as they are, the soft skills (e.g., problem solving and critical thinking) are difficult to evaluate objectively. One employer's critical thinker is another employer's trouble maker (Lynn and Wills 1994). Some school-to-work programs have, however, begun to develop assessment approaches that seem less arbitrary and more objective by identifying work-specific applications of these skills (e.g., "can identify and resolve the three most common types of customer service problems...").

The Cornell Youth and Work Program has developed easy-to-use materials for employers that capture a range of work-related skills. The WorkPlus demonstration designed by P/PV generated a set of *Supervisor* and *Employee Development Packets*. Jobs for the Future and the Boston Private Industry Council have designed a Learning Plan packet for employers that takes them through three critical steps: (1) identifying and articulating firm-specific competency requirements for a particular job; (2) translating those specific competencies into generic/transferable ones; and (3) using those competencies to train and assess students.

These tools could be helpful to welfare recipients entering the job market. Certainly in community service placements for recipients who cannot find unsubsidized employment, there will be both a need for and an opportunity to structure the experience in ways that identify learning objectives and that document progress. It remains to be seen whether employers who hire from the welfare population could be encouraged to introduce some of these learning enhancements into their standard procedures.

Learning plans could also benefit welfare recipients who have "cycled" through a number of jobs over the years, staying for short periods of time in each and not building a credible network of references or credentials. These workers are at a serious disadvantage when they hunt for jobs because no one (including themselves) believes they learned anything in their many jobs: employers automatically conclude that a checkered work history means no skills.

Consider the situation of Mary Ann Moore profiled in Chapter One. Jumping from job to job, her work record makes her look undependable and unskilled and does not capture skills she may have developed. What if, instead, Moore had been able to get help documenting retrospectively skills she had developed in her eleven-plus jobs, identifying the key transferable skills she had mastered, coaching her so she could speak articulately about her skills, and even assisting her in obtaining licenses or certificates she may have qualified for? Learning plan methodologies can be adapted to this kind of assessment of skills and knowledge learned in workplaces. They could help make visible and marketable the "tacit knowledge" that most people develop in workplaces, but that are difficult for them to articulate and define. The development of an individualized learning plan for each recipient could be both a retrospective and a prospective tool to help lower-skill individuals make the most of their work experience and position themselves for advancement.

School-to-Work and Welfare-to-Work: Lessons and Challenges

Welfare-to-work is an umbrella term for a range of programs designed to help move welfare recipients into employment. The majority of welfare-to-work programs do not actually involve work experience; they focus on services that can help recipients move off welfare into paid work. Strategies include: job search and job placement; adult basic education; job specific training; education and training programs; and various combinations of these services. Two different approaches have been developed: a "work-first" or "quick attachment to the labor force" approach, which emphasizes job search and placement; and a "human capital" approach, which focuses

on basic skill development and, to a lesser extent, job specific training.

The component of welfare programming where work experience is part of the program itself is usually called "workfare." These efforts—typically small, reaching a small segment of the caseload, and of short duration—require recipients to accept unpaid work experience in government or private non-profit agencies as a condition for public assistance. In general, these programs have paid little attention to issues of learning on the job, workplace pedagogy and supports, skill credentialing, or the integration of work and classroom instruction. Their goal has been work placements; and that has been the central concern of program staff. (Some suggestive exceptions are described in Chapter 4.)

Work-based learning requires thoughtful design and implementation, whether the target group is in-school youth or adults in the workplace. Just putting people into workplaces or jobs is no guarantee of learning. In fact, work-based strategies can be counterproductive if they pay too little attention to the quality of the work experience or to adequate safeguards and supports for participants. From our research on school-to-work initiatives, Jobs for the Future has distilled a set of design criteria that can strengthen the quality and effectiveness of work-based learning (Goldberger et al. 1994). These can be grouped into four clusters:

- Broad agreement on program goals and the roles of the various partners;
- Careful design of the structure and content of the work-based learning experiences, including specifying learning goals and documenting on-the-job learning;
- Reinforcement of workplace learning outside the workplace; and
- Adequate academic, social, and administrative supports for participating youth and institutional partners.

Strategies for enhancing learning at work, in either paid jobs or community service placements, must address these four dimensions of quality programming—only some of which can be wholly provided in the work setting itself.

Even the most ambitious and advanced school-to-work efforts have a long way to go in putting together these complementary elements of work-based learning. How easily can welfare-to-work efforts take on this challenge? In the next and final chapter, we propose what we believe are realistic steps to introduce and enhance work-based learning for welfare recipients—and changes in policy and practice that could accelerate such efforts. In the remainder of this chapter, we focus on several key differences between school-to-work and programs for welfare recipients.

School-to-work and work experience programs for welfare recipients share some characteristics. Both look to the workplace and work experiences to build confidence and basic work competencies. Both emphasize the motivational power of work. Both demand new roles for professionals (teachers, counselors, caseworkers) who must now know more about, and work more directly with, employers and work settings. To be effective, both must address "dual clients"—the individual participants and the employers who provide them with work opportunities.

At the same time, there are many important differences between school-to-work and most welfare work experience programs that have been implemented to date. (See Figure 3.2 at the end of this chapter.) School-to-work programs are explicitly designed to integrate learning and work. Most welfare work programs are about work and its intrinsic value, not work as a learning opportunity to be structured and mined. Other critically important differences include the following:

1. **Employer perceptions** of young people in school-to-work programs differ greatly from their views on welfare recipients and low-skill employees in work placement programs.
2. **The expectations held by the two target populations** may be quite divergent, affecting the ability of new program opportunities to spark participants' self-confidence and motivation.
3. **School-to-work initiatives rely on schools** for academic instruction and a safe place to reflect on lessons from the worksite. This institutional base is absent in current and proposed welfare programming.

Employer Perceptions

Employers who have not been involved in school-to-work programs tend to have quite negative views of youth: they see young people as undisciplined, unwilling to work hard, and lacking in essential education and skills. By contrast, employers with direct experience of student workers from school-to-work programs are far more satisfied with young people and their productivity (Zemsky 1994; Lynn and Wills 1994).

Employers tend to view positively and make allowances for students they employ as part of a school-to-work initiative. They typically modify to some extent their normal employer/employee relationship so that it includes elements of tutelage for individuals who are seen as young (and therefore exempt from some quality standards) and as learners (and therefore exempt from normal productivity requirements). Consciously or not, employers probably view students as more malleable than their adult workers. Lynn and Wills (1994) note that a manager of a large automobile service center preferred hiring co-op students to adults "so that the company can mold them and train them. In his view, more experienced workers—even those with occupational credentials—always brought with them 'negative baggage.'"

In the name of learning, employers frequently permit school-to-work students to deviate from the normal workplace routine. Students typically have shortened hours and interrupt work to attend formal learning sessions. Often, students rotate through a variety of jobs and can perform work normally reserved for paid workers with more years of education and/or experience. Some employers devise special projects or instructional activities for students such as presentations from staff. And finally, participating employers frequently hold youthful students to different standards of dress and work performance. For example, a document misfiled by a student is likely to become the occasion for a brief lesson in filing systems or the importance of accuracy rather than a disciplinary action. As the Office of Technology Assessment (U.S. Congress 1995) study of work-based learning concluded: "Students do not seem to be held to authentic workplace standards across the board, although that seems to be the goal of each employer."

In contrast, employers view regular workers primarily through the lens of production and productivity and it is likely that most employers will view similarly welfare recipients they hire for paid employment. Employers resist exempting workers from their routines, primarily because exemptions result in productivity losses. Permitting workers to perform tasks outside their job grades/descriptions runs up against complex rules and procedures that codify normal routine (collective bargaining agreements or inflexible personnel categories; contention over employer demands for flexibility vs. workers' demands for more pay for more work; etc.). While many businesses recognize a probationary period for new workers during which standards are different, standards during that period (e.g., number of absences allowed) are frequently stricter, not looser, because probation is viewed as a testing time.

Participant Perceptions and Expectations

The contexts within which young people enter school-to-work programs and welfare recipients enter work are quite different. School-to-work students are still in school. Many may be at-risk, but they have not yet given up totally or been given up on. Welfare recipients are generally out-of-school and out-of-work, disconnected from society to a great degree, and pressured by poverty, family responsibilities, and other challenges. Most have failed in school, in work, and in many cases, in building a strong family.

We should not expect these two groups to react to work-based learning opportunities in the same ways. Students' enthusiasm for and personal investment in school-to-work programs play an enormous role in employers' generally positive response. In turn, students are motivated to make significant personal commitments partly because of the attention, support, and encouragement they receive from teachers and in the workplace. Students typically volunteer and even compete for entry into school-to-work programs. For students from disadvantaged backgrounds, work in a school-to-work setting represents a chance to make up for lost time and low skill levels—a chance to take advantage of a desirable program. And even when students receive few special supports or are stuck in a

tedious assignment, they know that the assignment will end, and relatively soon.

The workplace experiences of welfare recipients do not hold the same promise and hope. The attitudes of low-skill and low-wage workers regarding their jobs are likely to be ambivalent. In Virginia Schein's interviews (1995) with welfare recipients, the work experiences they described to her were the polar opposites of those in quality school-to-work programs: work is full of rules and inflexibility; support is minimal; respect is rare. One woman who had worked in a foundry said, "They don't really train you. You just put your earmuffs on and get to work. . . ." The organizations they worked for felt little responsibility to them, and they were easily replaced. In this context, it is not surprising that welfare recipients might be less optimistic, more resigned to failure, and less able to persevere.

The Role of the School

Perhaps the most important difference between the school-to-work arena and that of welfare-to-work is conveyed in one word: *school*. School-to-work programs begin in and are rooted in the educational system and the institution of the school. Even in the work-based learning component, schools are invariably responsible for providing an important part of the learning. In reality, very few employers are equipped (in either personnel or materials) to provide instruction in academic subjects (Vickers 1996).[3]

Schools serve many functions that are critically important to the effectiveness of school-to-work programs. Schools provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on their work experience and learn from it. This opportunity to step back and put experience into perspective is critical to developing generic skills that are portable and transferable. Without an off-the-job learning venue, the power of work to motivate learning is weakened.

Schools are organized around academic learning: staff see this as their profession; curricula and materials already exist. Basic literacy and numeracy are part of their mandate and (with uneven performance) their expertise. Schools and school systems have resources. Even urban systems that are strapped for funds have staff, some resources for staff development, and an institutional knowledge base on instructional techniques and materials. Compared to community-based training providers, schools are solid, endowed institutions. Schools can also help overcome other, logistical obstacles to effective work-based learning, such as providing transportation services that make it easier for students to get to their workplaces.

There is no effective counterpart to the school in the world of welfare-to-work. No single institution has responsibility for the educational component of the learning program that recipients need. Moreover, incentives in the new welfare legislation makes work a substitute for education, rather than encouraging the integration of work and educational programming.

Community-based training providers could pick up some of the slack, particularly if they receive support to move into services and supports where they have less experience. As we discuss in the next chapter, welfare-to-work programs will need to focus on such approaches to create a counterpart to the schools and to perform the functions outlined above if work-based learning is to be a significant aid to the welfare population.

[3] A number of programs for out-of-school youth incorporate work-based learning. These generally operate without school partners, although some are coordinated as part of an alternative diploma program. A better understanding of the structure and content of these models would be valuable to planners of welfare-to-work programs.

Figure 3-2: Potential Differences Between School-to-Work and Welfare-to-Work that May Affect Attempts to Transfer Strategies

	SCHOOL-TO-WORK	WELFARE-TO-WORK
EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVES	Perceiving students as young, malleable learners, employers frequently modify standard workplace operations to create a learning environment, permitting: • deviation from normal routine (e.g., shorter hours) • special mobility through sites, jobs, tasks • special instructional activities • attenuation of quality/production standards.	Welfare recipients will almost certainly be hired as regular employees, for whom standards and routines have been established to meet production requirements: • deviation from normal routine would interrupt production • personnel guidelines/union rules generally prevent working outside particular job descriptions • production is rarely interrupted for special events • quality/production standards are enforced through discipline.
PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES	Students often volunteer for or compete for school-to-work assignments; responding in part to the range of special supports, they usually bring enthusiasm, energy and commitment to their work. Co-workers generally respond supportively, but there are some reports of resentment over special treatment and fear of being undercut by lower student wages.	Recipients in time-limited situations will not be in voluntary assignments; there will be few special supports; recipients may bring considerable "negative baggage" with them. Co-workers' potential fears of low-wage competition and resentment of special treatment may be better founded and stronger. Employers in the JFF survey stressed the important of "equal treatment" for potential welfare hires and other employees.
INSTITUTIONAL BASES	School is the anchor, guiding and supporting the students even at the worksite, and providing time and space for reflection and academic instruction that build on the workplace learning.	There is no counterpart institution that has been assigned responsibility (and resources) for, or accepted responsibility for, organizing and supporting recipients' learning.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Work-Based Learning for Welfare Recipients: Opportunities, Limits, and Next Steps

In our research, we have identified both opportunities for, and limits to, the use of work-based learning in welfare-to-work programs. In the current welfare debate, there has been little consideration of using work—either paid employment or typically unpaid community service—as an opportunity for learning that might help recipients advance. Yet, the goal of reduced dependency will be unattainable without strategies to increase the ability of recipients to retain jobs and advance in them. Time limits for benefits mean recipients must not just get a job but also stay employed. This creates further pressure for a closer look at work-based learning strategies and how they can be effectively structured and supported for the welfare population.

As the previous chapter indicates, work-based learning has been a powerful motivator and learning experience in school-to-work initiatives, particularly with disadvantaged students whose skill sets are similar to those of many welfare recipients. Important lessons—promising and cautionary—can be gleaned from recent experience in that field.

Our assessment of employer expectations, welfare recipient skills, and the potential for enhancing work-based learning in low-skill jobs presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, although we found little evidence that employers are actively pursuing innovative and learning-rich training strategies for these workers, we identified some common employer practices which can be built upon to increase the learning content of low-skill jobs. Moreover, a sizable number of employers we surveyed in the tight labor markets of Cleveland and Milwaukee were receptive to new ideas about improving the quality of their low-skill workforce (particularly in the areas of technical skills, teamwork and other soft skills, and a broader understanding of the firm and its competitive context).

On the other hand, there are significant obstacles to the diffusion of work-based learning for welfare recipients and other low-wage workers. Employer interest is uneven. Some employers will invest little or nothing in their low-skill workforce. Others are limited by their physical spaces and the type of business they operate. For example, many small retail establishments, consisting only of a sales area with a small back room for inventory, have no good place to meet with employees for training or other purposes. Even enthusiastic employers will not take the necessary steps to expand work-based learning. Lacking staff capacity, knowledge, and time, they are unlikely to seek out models, materials, and expertise on their own.[1]

[1] We found, for example, that eating and drinking establishments work at such a feverish pace that they have difficulty setting aside time for dealing with anything but food preparation, cleaning, and customer service. We were unable to convince a single eating and drinking establishment to take the time to respond to the employer survey.

Employers who are interested in expanding training and enriching the work experience for low-skill workers are clear about the conditions under which they would participate. Interventions must cost little and have minimal impact on supervisory time. They must be easy to implement. They must also be justifiable in terms of productivity and/or quality gains. If work-based learning interventions can help employers improve employee recruitment and screening, there will be more interest. If training is in technical, literary, and soft skills directly relevant to production and customer service, employers are more likely to be receptive.

While employer interest constrains the diffusion of work-based learning, the skill development needs of many welfare recipients also sets limits on what can be accomplished at the worksite alone. The skill deficiencies of many in the welfare population cannot be addressed solely by adding modest incremental activities to daily work routines. Additional education and training will be necessary, preferably integrated with work experience, but not limited to skills that can be learned on the job.

In this final chapter, we propose ways to structure learning at work more effectively for welfare recipients. We argue that practice and policy must respond to the needs of two clients at once—low-skill workers and their employers. This "dual client" perspective is important if welfare policy is to be both work-based and also help recipients advance toward a career that can keep a family out of poverty. In the new welfare policy context, more and more learning and training for recipients will be expected to take place in the workplace. Education and training programs that have traditionally been part of efforts to increase welfare recipients' skills will become less readily available. Strategies for enhancing learning at work therefore take on new importance. However, the extent to which work alone can be expected to raise skill levels and lead to advancement for this population should not be overestimated.

To address this issue, we focus on the three work-based learning strategies identified in the previous chapter: mentoring, contextual learning, and skill credentialing. We assess the potential for their use in both the paid employment opportunities that welfare recipients are likely to find and in the typically unpaid community service placements that many will be required to take when they cannot find paid work. We then identify two sets of partners—in addition to employers of low-skill workers—who must be engaged more fully if work-based learning in welfare programs is to be more effective: (1) third-party providers of technical assistance, materials, and tools; and (2) the educational institutions which provide credentials valued in the labor market.

We conclude with a brief assessment of public policy changes that will be needed if work-based learning is to become more widespread and effective in welfare programming. We advocate closer integration among the welfare, education, and training systems, so that promising practices in connecting work and learning can more easily transfer across systems and so that less skilled and less educated individuals can move more easily into the mainstream of the nation's employment and education systems. A diverse range of community institutions, from manufacturing technology centers to community colleges to churches, can play a role in supporting and structuring work-based learning for low-skill workers. Closing these two gaps—the links to the education system and the need for supports and services from third parties—will require concerted effort and also incentives to promote change in those directions. Employers, too, are likely to need financial incentives to encourage them to spend valuable time and resources on new ways to enrich the learning content and opportunities for workers in low-skill jobs.

Expanding Work-Based Learning Strategies in Low-Skill Workplaces

In our investigation, we identified three skill-related challenges facing many welfare recipients that work-based learning approaches can help address. These are:

- Understanding the workplace and how to "navigate" it;
- Learning a range of skills and knowledge broader than what is needed to accomplish immediate job tasks; and
- Getting credit that employers will recognize and accept for skills and knowledge mastered on the job.

In the following pages, we review the extent to which employers in the private sector use the three work-based learning strategies identified in Chapter 3—*mentoring, contextual learning, and credentialing*—in orienting and training their entry-level workers, and assess whether their practices could serve as a "platform" on which to build more effective work-based learning opportunities. We then turn to the opportunities for learning at and through work that the community service requirements in the new welfare legislation could potentially provide.

1. Mentoring

We did not find well-developed mentoring programs for low-skill workers among the employers we surveyed. However, there is fairly widespread use of the mentor-like "buddy system." In addition, employers we interviewed recognize and have a positive association with the concept of mentoring. They perceive support from more experienced co-workers as an effective strategy for teaching skills that are essential to the firm's productivity.

The buddy systems described by employers we surveyed fall short of effective mentoring practice. Most are short-term and are typically limited to the technical component of workplace learning. Most buddies are also low-skill employees. Their expertise is likely to be limited to the tasks and processes they perform and the culture and norms of their work group. They are unlikely to have a deep repertoire of coaching and teaching methods, and they are likely to be limited in their ability to transfer knowledge of cognitive and social skills required at higher levels in the firm, or theoretical underpinnings of work tasks and processes.

However, the buddy system provides a platform that can be built upon to bring more extensive and well-supported mentoring efforts into low-skill workplaces. One low-cost way to enhance the buddy system to benefit low-skill workers is to train buddies in coaching techniques and in ways to help new hires succeed. Based on employer survey responses, off-the-shelf training packages that could be implemented easily in-house have a good chance of finding a market. The package could be modularized, so that employers could select topics of particular relevance to their workplace. It could be customized to specific industries, since employers tend to want training that is directly relevant and not too general. Videos, accompanied by written training manuals, are a low-cost approach to packaging and distribution that is familiar to many employers, relatively low in cost, and aligned with recent advances in learning technology.

2. Contextual Learning

We found some indication that employers are beginning to see a need to provide more than job-specific knowledge to low-skill employees. A surprisingly large group of employers we surveyed said they tried to provide entry-level workers with a "broader knowledge of the company and industry," though few had incorporated it into formal training.

Certain approaches to providing "broader knowledge" of the firm or industry might be relatively easy to introduce. Some might be adapted from materials and tools generated by school-to-work and innovative vocational education efforts that emphasize instruction in "all aspects of the industry."[2] Upgrading of orientation and training for new hires would be a good place to start. For example, a training module on a topic such as "what new hires need to know about customers" could encourage supervisors to articulate and emphasize customer-related skills (e.g., quality control) and knowledge (e.g., customer preferences) that would be valuable to the employee. New-hire training that integrated task and process instruction with learning about the company's customer base or changing competitive challenges could improve both the learning of specific tasks and the hire's understanding of how her job was important to the firm.

Exposure of incumbent workers to new knowledge

[2] The Perkins Vocational Education Act Amendments of 1990 included language requiring all vocational programs to provide instruction in "all aspects of the industry," which was defined to include planning, management, finances, technical and production skills, underlying principles of technology, labor and community issues, and health/safety/environment issues. While implementation has been uneven, curricular materials and other tools have been developed by national organizations and local programs to help schools and instructors move beyond narrow technical skill development.

can also be built into the work schedule. In-service seminars in the health industry are one opportunity identified in our survey. Every health care employer we interviewed offered regular in-service seminars. Nursing assistants were either required or encouraged to attend. The content of these seminars could be expanded to include skills and knowledge needed by nursing assistants to advance in the health field. Presentation methods (which appeared to be lectures) could also be augmented to include active and experiential instructional approaches that have proven more effective for less academically-successful learners.

If employers are to increase the use of contextual learning approaches to enhance the skills and knowledge of low-wage employees, two challenges will have to be overcome. First, employers will have to believe that such an approach will have a positive impact on productivity or quality. This will require evidence that more attention to training and learning on the job will reduce turnover rates, improve rejection rates, enhance customer service levels, or otherwise help the bottom line.

In addition, employers will need to see an effective, yet easy-to-introduce and implement, mechanism for structuring contextual learning into existing workplace training. "Learning plans" like those used in some school-to-work programs might be a useful tool. These forms lead supervisors through a process of identifying and selecting the transferable skills they consider essential for a particular job and the performance measures that will be used to determine whether the trainee has mastered those skills. The process helps supervisors make their job-related tacit knowledge explicit, which makes it easier to identify opportunities for expanding or enriching learning on the job.

There are exciting efforts across the nation that integrate work-based learning into welfare education and training programs. Project Edge in New York State, for example, brings work-based approaches into adult basic education courses funded by the welfare system. One example is a distance-learning program created by the technical-vocational BOCES district in the St. Lawrence region in which teachers use materials gathered from participants' workplaces to customize lessons for individuals in the program. Efforts like this will need to increase if welfare recipients are to earn credentials that are portable and valuable. Employers will be unlikely to undertake this kind effort on their own. Technical assistance from an outside party will be needed to help provide support and to motivate employers to move in this direction.

3. Credentialing

Could employers be motivated to credential skills learned in low-wage workplaces? Very few of the employers we surveyed have internal skill credentialing programs. Few are interested in developing them. Some employers use "skill check lists," primarily to guide the training of new hires and, in some cases, certify progress for purposes of retention or compensation. Employers we interviewed were not opposed to the idea of employees entering such checklists into their personnel files as a form of rudimentary skill credential. But there was little enthusiasm for employer credentialing of worker skill.

Labor economists will not be surprised by this finding. According to economic theory, credentialing of skills learned on the job increases the likelihood that the employee will demand higher compensation for new skills or seek a job elsewhere armed with a credential that other employers would value. In either case, the employer is less likely to recoup the original training investment. In the United States, perhaps for this reason, employers look primarily to credentials earned outside the workplace. As one study (Klerman and Karoly 1995: 7) concludes: "[T]he current institutional arrangement in the U.S. [is one where] most training that leads to a publicly-recognized credential is paid for by the individual. Firms are more likely to pay for training (on-the-job or otherwise) when that training does not lead to a credential."

The lack of employer interest in employer-generated credentials is evident in the British Youth Training Scheme (YTS) experience. In the 1980s, the Thatcher government created this program to encourage employers to provide and credential general skills on the job. However, employers were primarily interested in screening and identifying good employees and neither employers nor trainees felt the credential was particularly valuable (Cappelli 1996: 681):

Employers pulled participants out of YTS and into [entry-level] jobs, and the trainees went willingly. It got to the point that, if a participant actually completed YTS, it was taken as a signal that the firm did not think that the trainee was good enough to keep. A completion credential became a handicap.

Yet, employers' general aversion to issuing credentials should not obscure their interest in receiving reliable credentials from job applicants about their experience and skills. In both school-to-work and other contexts, employers have expressed the need for mechanisms that help them sort qualified from less qualified applicants (Lynn and Wills 1994; Holzer 1996). Reliable third-party credentialing of work-related skills might benefit both low-skill workers and employers interested in hiring them. Learning plans can promote such credentialing by providing a relatively easy way to begin to identify and assess competencies developed on the job.

Ultimately, given the nature of the U.S. education and employment systems, the credentials that matter to earnings and employment outcomes are educational ones. Work-based learning efforts should be integrated where possible with classroom-based programs providing high school diplomas, GEDs, and postsecondary degrees and certificates for those who lack them, so that participants can advance in both work and schooling as they desire. Community colleges, which in many communities are emerging as the public institution most responsive to local employers and best able to address the needs of adult learners, should play an important role, as should community-based organizations and adult education organizations that know how to reach and work with low-skill populations.

Work-Based Learning in Welfare Programs: The Community Service Placement

In most states, a significant segment of the welfare population will be unable to secure paid work at the end of two years of collecting benefits (the most common onset of the work requirement in state plans). These individuals will have to accept community service placements.

There is a base of experience within welfare programming of providing recipients with unpaid work experience in community service jobs, either in government or the private non-profit sector (Brock et al. 1993). These "workfare" experiments that were part of WIN, CWEP, food stamp workfare and other programs since the 1960s have typically required recipients to take community service assignments as a condition of public assistance. In general, workfare programs have operated on a limited scale, for a small percentage of the eligible population, and for short time periods, usually three months. Little attention has been paid in these programs to the quality of the work placement, or to strategies for enriching learning in those jobs. This does not mean that the placements involved "make work." Positions were generally in maintenance, clerical work, park services, or human services; participants in community service placements and their supervisors reported that the work was meaningful. However, there is little evidence from these programs that unpaid work experience as typically implemented leads to new or improved skills, consistent employment or earnings effects, or reductions in welfare receipt (Berlin 1996).

Current arrangements and proposals for community service placements for those who cannot find paid work are likely to repeat the patterns of the past. Strategies to help enrich the learning experience of these placements or to coordinate community service placements with supplemental education programs will be the exception. This is because of the relatively high costs of such services, the lack of state encouragement of work-based learning approaches, and the absence of curricular and training tools and materials that could be easily introduced into community service work settings. Yet, as isolated innovative efforts indicate, these placements hold out the possibility of enhanced learning at work and an institutional receptivity to integrating work and learning that employers providing paid work can rarely afford. Efforts to strengthen the learning component of these placements could be a fruitful direction for state and local innovation.

Some innovative programs have tried to introduce more purposeful and structured learning into unpaid community work placements. One of the most ambitious is Project Match in Chicago, which uses volunteer placements as part of a developmental strategy to

assist recipients who are profoundly detached from the labor force. Placements are designed to provide a realistic and supportive setting for individuals taking their first steps on the project's "incremental ladder to economic independence," mastering competencies related to job-readiness, such as getting a child to school on time and oneself to the "job." Many participants need to start with very small workplace commitments like these, as little as five hours a week initially, and then move gradually into ten- and then twenty-hour work weeks before they attempt paid employment. Yet, as integral as the volunteer placements are to Project Match's overall design, the initiative has only begun to consider introducing training materials, learning plans, and other tools for formalizing learning on the job (Herr and Wagner with Majeske 1995).

Another innovative workfare program is the Alternative Work Experience Program: Unemployed Parents Initiative (AWEP-UP) in Philadelphia. This program, which has served over 150 individuals from two-parent families on public assistance during the past two years, combines on-the-job training through community service experience in non-profit organizations with a seminar which "helps participants prepare to find work, deal with life problems that make it difficult to find and keep a job, learn to work with people from different backgrounds, develop conflict resolution skills, build critical thinking skills, understand the economics of the Philadelphia area, and foster a sense of citizenship" (Schneider 1996:1). AWEP-UP also provides counseling and support service to participants and remains in close contact with employing agencies. The AWEP-UP model differs from standard workfare programs in its emphasis on simultaneous participation in education and work experience activities. The community service experience is used as the basis for job readiness training, conflict resolution, and other lessons. Classroom experience and the service placement reinforce and work off each other.

In Milwaukee, we interviewed staff from the Health Clinic at the Centro de la Comunidad Unida, which has turned to work-based learning through internships as a way to prepare Spanish-speaking counselors. It also uses work-based internships as part of an ongoing informal program to upgrade the job readiness of unemployed local residents. Interns are treated like other staff. Supervisors work with interns on their job-keeping skills. The Clinic does not, however, use any formal curriculum, materials or assessment procedures. Staff expressed a keen interest in tools that could lessen the development costs in time and effort for their work-based initiative.

Project New Hope, also in Milwaukee, is another example of an innovative unpaid work experience effort whose participants could benefit from a more rigorous and effective approach to structure and credential skills learned in community service placements. Project New Hope places low-income individuals in community service settings as one component of its community-level strategy to reduce poverty and lessen welfare dependency. The organization has no formal way to track progress in the development and mastery of basic job-holding skills, but project staff recognize that such a record could help participants when they later apply for jobs. They are interested in testing and using easy tools that can help them credential technical and other skills learned in community service work.

These innovative programs provide reason for optimism that community-based settings can be improved and strengthened as learning venues for welfare recipients. In these settings, well-designed work-based learning approaches can help non-job-ready individuals develop basic social and "soft skills," as well as career advancement skills valuable to their job search. These programs could prepare recipients for the world of paid work and certify participants' skills when key competencies have been achieved. Since many welfare recipients will be assigned to community service placements (at fairly considerable cost, if past experience is any guide), formalizing the learning content of the experience could be added at relatively little extra cost.

The community placement setting is not without its challenges as a learning environment for low-skill individuals. Participating organizations frequently lack the administrative structures, staff capacity, and sensitivity to learning methods to provide effective work-based learning. Adding a training responsibility could overwhelm organizations that are

already overloaded. In addition, if the placements are not well-designed, they can simply be out-of-the-home destinations where recipients go and sit, learning nothing and experiencing a further erosion in their self-image and motivation. Because these placements are typically unpaid, it can be hard to replicate the high stakes and pressures of an actual workplace. In most communities, if unpaid placements are to become powerful learning opportunities, organizations that provide them will need help with: the design of the work activities; staff development; and curricular materials and easy-to-implement learning tools. Additional research is needed on the capacity and willingness of local institutions to provide more learning-rich unpaid placements.

Two Gaps: Technical Assistance and Integration with Education System

There is little question that employers— both those offering paid work and those offering community service placements—will need help introducing or expanding work-based learning for low-skill adults. Few employers possess the expertise to develop and implement their own programs. Moreover, most employers are unlikely to deliver certain types of training to their low-skill employees, such as academic subjects and career advancement skill development. Work-based learning will spread more rapidly if third party organizations provide employers and their workers with ideas, models, materials, and easy-to-use training tools.

At the same time, learning at work will need to be better integrated with educational institutions where broader knowledge development and credentialing are possible. Ultimately, as in school-to-work efforts, the key to effective learning programs is the partnership between employers and education providers—and a carefully-designed division of labor regarding skills and lessons that can be learned on the job and those that must be learned off-site. This second set of partners must be part of any strategy to use work experience to change significantly the employment and earnings outcomes of welfare recipients.

Technical Assistance: Help from Third Parties

During our Cleveland and Milwaukee field investigations, JFF performed a quick assessment of the capacity of third party institutions to provide technical assistance on work-based learning strategies. We interviewed skilled and dedicated practitioners from a variety of programs: community-based organizations; welfare-to-work programs; neighborhood development organizations; employer consortia; manufacturing modernization efforts; community colleges; workplace literacy providers; and church-based employment programs (see Appendix 1 for full list). Although none of the organizations we interviewed currently has the capacity to deliver the range of work-based learning needed by recipients in welfare-to-work programs, we found some interesting models for partnering with employers on their entry-level employment and training needs, as well as a broad-based network of institutions that routinely work with both low-skill employees and the firms that employ them. Several organizations we spoke with have experience with work-based learning. Others have especially good working relations with employers that provide low-skill jobs.

Milwaukee and Cleveland are unlikely to be exceptions. There are opportunities in most communities for non-profit and other intermediary groups to help accelerate awareness of work-based learning options and build and be part of partnerships that reduce the implementation burden on employers.

Organizations with many different purposes and expertise could play a role in supporting greater work-based learning. *Manufacturing extension centers* in both cities are promising resources. Working closely with employers, these centers provide skill development that can help less-experienced workers secure, and move up in, manufacturing jobs. In northwest Milwaukee, a rehabilitated factory houses a variety of programs that have been developed in collaboration with workplace education and literacy experts at the local technical college. Programs focus not just on technical training but also on basic academic learning and soft skills such as leadership and teamwork. In Cleveland, a manufacturing center offers a community-college degree program integrating academics and hands-on machine operation. Through its employer connections, it has also developed a short-term welfare-to-work program in manual machine operation that should pay graduates $9/hour.

Workplace education and literacy programs that have a track record of responding to employer needs for workplace-based programs in adult basic education and English as a Second Language can be another important partner. In Cleveland, for example, the continuing education program of the public school system promotes services for low-skill employees to local employers and is developing a program to train welfare recipients in pre-employment soft skills. In our brief reconnaissance in Cleveland and Milwaukee, we identified *community colleges*, *employer consortia* such as WIRE-Net in Cleveland, *church-based employee recruitment programs*, and *welfare departments* responsible for the JOBS program as other organizations that can be engaged in helping to deliver or support work-based learning, given sufficient incentives. In our interviews, we found significant interest among these organizations in building on their existing expertise and networks to play a role in the work component of welfare reform.

Integration with the Education System

One of the clearest lessons from the school-to-work experience is the importance of the school as a partner with employers and the public. Integration of school- and work-based learning is critical to the success of school-to-work programs—for reasons of pedagogy, efficient use of resources, and effective division of labor among institutions with different missions and expertise. Yet, the new welfare reform legislation directs states toward work placements and provides disincentives to pre-employment education and training. Although experience in the training and education fields argues for creative strategies to *integrate* work- and classroom-based learning, welfare reform promotes the *substitution* of work experience for educational programming.

The pendulum will have to swing back toward greater integration with the education system if welfare reform is going to help a large segment of the welfare population keep, and advance in, jobs. Because most welfare recipients have already failed in traditional high school classrooms, alternative institutional settings are critically important, such as alternative high schools, community colleges, and proprietary schools that are able to work collaboratively with employers. Work is a powerful motivator and can be a rich site for learning, but there are also real limits to the learning potential of most low-skill workplaces. Other educational providers will need to fill learning gaps, so that welfare recipients master the diverse skills they need to succeed in the entry-level labor market and to advance toward self-reliance. Creative approaches to scheduling and linking work placements and classroom instruction will be necessary.

For many decades, the "second chance" training system sponsored by the federal government primarily through the Department of Labor has had disappointing results in helping disadvantaged Americans develop skills and escape poverty. The track record of educational programs funded through the welfare system is similar: modest earnings and welfare receipt impacts, but not enough to move participants out of poverty. Moreover, at least in terms of short-term earnings and welfare spending impacts, welfare-to-work strategies that emphasize education services first had less positive results than work-first approaches (Berlin 1996).

Norton Grubb (1996) of the University of California at Berkeley has recently written of the need to reintegrate the job training and education systems, since job training programs have historically been unable to move people out of poverty, but formal education and its diplomas and degree credentials have made a significant difference. Grubb argues that a learning system organized around work and careers must build in two components if it is to serve disadvantaged populations well. These are: (1) clear ladders or maps connecting the short-term job-related training programs to longer-term postsecondary certificate and degree programs, particularly at the community college level; and (2) guidance and support services that are integrated into work-based learning programs, so that less-prepared individuals with particular obstacles to their advancement can stay at work and engage in learning long enough to begin to benefit and move up. Given the current thrust of welfare reform, this argument must now be extended to include the welfare system. Closer linkages among employers, educational institutions, and public training systems will be needed if opportunity is to open significantly for the welfare population. This poses policy challenges for state planners in and across these related but quite separate systems.

Directions for Policy

In the previous pages, we focused on the need for tools, materials, staff development, and other assistance that can help lower the costs to employers of introducing or expanding work-based learning for their low-skill workers. Some employers in the private, public, and non-profit sectors can probably be coaxed into expanding their work-based learning efforts if they are provided assistance and can see potential benefits to the firm. For these employers, tools and support that make it easier to participate and that simplify their adoption of mentoring or contextual learning may be sufficient.

However, there are few materials and tools in existence today that can serve employers and their low-skill workers well. And employers will need to feel much more certain that they will not be taking unnecessary risks before significant numbers embrace the ideas proposed here.

Work experience alone will not "solve" welfare dependency. The most effective work-first strategies combine structured group job search with education, training, and work experience for those who have not found jobs, coupled with access to employment information and support services once they find employment (Berlin 1996). In our view, public policymakers at the state and federal levels will have to consider more active policy interventions if they want work-based learning to diffuse more rapidly and effectively through welfare programs. A concerted effort to use work to improve the life prospects of welfare recipients cannot rest with initial placement into jobs, but most be bolstered by ongoing career advice, support services, and educational opportunity. Moreover, the market alone will not generate the opportunities and assistance that employers will need to engage in large numbers in providing quality work-based learning for low-skill workers.

At first blush, it would seem that these proposals fly in the face of powerful trends since federal welfare expenditures will be reduced by tens of billions of dollars over the next five years. However, in the first few years of implementation of the new welfare bill, many of the nation's largest states will receive short-term windfalls in welfare dollars from the federal government due to reductions in caseloads that have occurred since the date used in the legislation to calculate state funding formulas. If there is any time for reallocation of resources and experiments with enriching the learning component of welfare work programs, that time is now.

1. **Grants/support for third parties**: Employers—whether in the public or private sectors, whether they provide paid jobs or community service placements—are unlikely to be proactive in developing richer and more structured work-based learning programs. They will need help identifying and implementing approaches, methods, tools, and supports they can use easily. Given the current paucity of materials, tools, and staff development vehicles, incentive grants and short-term "venture capital" should be invested in building the infrastructure to support employers willing to move in this direction. Incentive grants should be structured to give localities maximum flexibility in promoting institutions and partnerships that have credibility and experience working with employers and/or low-skill workers. Public investment may be needed for only a limited period—to pay for the development costs of curriculum, partnership-building, staff development and other needed supports and services begin to drop.
2. **Laboratories and demonstration projects:** Developing effective work-based learning programs for welfare recipients is still largely uncharted terrain. States and the federal government should fund a set of highly visible demonstration projects that encourage innovation and experimentation with different models of designing, delivering, and administering work-based learning for welfare recipients. What can be done with community-service placements? How far will employers be willing to go in promoting contextual learning? What kinds of partnerships are most effective? What tools, materials, and staff development strategies have the greatest impact? What division of labor between private employers, non-profit service placements, and the education system should be encouraged? Innovation could be sparked by competitive grants whose results are assessed through evaluation studies.

3. **Financial incentives for participating employers**: Experience from past employment programs for low-skill workers indicates that subsidies to employers may be necessary to increase the take-up rate. In the welfare field, wage subsidies to employers that hire welfare recipients have had mixed results. Small on-the-job training programs that have included employer subsidies have increased earnings and led to higher paying jobs, but programs have typically generated limited interest among employers and reached only a small segment of the caseload. From our work in the school-to-work field, we believe that employers are more interested in consistency of quality in those they recruit and hire than in subsidies, particularly wage subsidies for hiring or working with particular population groups. There are other reasons for caution on wage subsidies. From an economic perspective, wage subsidies have tended to provide a windfall for employers. Moreover, wage subsidies that follow individuals tend to place a negative stigma on individuals who qualify for the credit. If, as a nation, we want employers to deepen their efforts to turn work experiences for disadvantaged individuals into learning experiences that make a difference in employment and earnings over time, some kinds of financial incentives will be needed. However, the most effective incentives might be those that reduce staff training costs or cut the costs of participation through funding intermediaries to simplify and reduce employer coordination and training costs.
4. **Integration of the welfare, employment and training, and education systems**: The welfare system must be more closely and coherently linked to the education system that provides valued credentials. Policy should encourage and create incentives that increase vertical linkages among the education, training, and welfare systems. In this way, they can begin to converge into one coherent learning and workforce development system. We have argued strongly for work-based learning and its potential. At the same time, we have also warned of the limits to skill development on the job in low-skill workplaces. Research on school-to-work and other work-related efforts to motivate individuals to learn leads us to conclude that it is the integration of work-based learning experiences with opportunities to reflect, explore academic and theoretical material, coax out generalizable lessons, and escape the narrow demands of production that together promote quality learning. This requires relationships among different skill development systems—employer-provided training, the education system, the employment and training system, and the welfare system—that are difficult to promote and sustain today.

Ultimately, public policy at the federal and state levels will have to address the relationships between and among these different systems. As they do, the goal should be a system that is based on the integration of work and learning and closer relations among employers, educational institutions, and public training systems. It should be built around clear ladders or maps connecting short-term job training programs to longer term post-secondary educational credentials, as well as adequate social supports and guidance that can help less-prepared individuals overcome some of the obstacles keeping them from staying at work and engaging in learning long enough to benefit and to advance.

As the federal and state governments try to absorb welfare reform into their workforce development and education priorities, work-based learning may be a thread that can bring these diverse systems closer together. But policymakers will have to want to design and implement a coherent system. And they will have to be committed to a system that rises to the standards of modernized employers and postsecondary educational institutions.

APPENDIX I

Individuals Interviewed for this Project

PRACTITIONERS (CLEVELAND)

Dr. Charles F. Barth, Director, Manufacturing Learning Center at Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland Advanced Manufacturing Program (CAMP)
Clarence Brown, Manager, Employment Services, WIRE-Net
Ianonia and Leo Champion, Co-pastors, Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church
John Colm, Executive Director, WIRE-Net
Joseph Francesconi, CFO, TempsPlus/the Computer Learning Center
Pat Heller, Coordinator of Workplace Education Programs for Cleveland, Cleveland Public Schools/Community and Adult Education
Dennis Herttua, Associate Director, Hire Locally, WIRE-Net
George Hrbek, Director of Employment Services, Cuyahoga County
Tim Poole, co-owner, West End Diaper Service
David Roth, Executive Director, Cleveland Works
Robin Smalley, Project Administrator, Neighborhood Job Match, Vocational Guidance Services
Mary Catherine Topp, Cleveland Public Schools/Community and Adult Education
Fatima Weathers, Program Manager, The Manufacturing Learning Center at Cuyahoga Community College

PRACTITIONERS (MILWAUKEE)

Willie Edmonds III, Supervisor, Project New Hope CSJ Placements, Lisbon Avenue Neighborhood Development
Rene Farias, Assistant Director, Health Clinic, Centro de la Comunidad Unidad
Christine Fisher, Executive Director of Northeast Milwaukee Industrial Development Corporation, co-sponsor of the Riverworks
John Gardner, Director, The Jobs Connection
Sheila Jensen, Business Services Specialist, Northeast Milwaukee Industrial Development Corporation
Julie Kerksick, Assistant Director, Project New Hope
Julius Morgan, Milwaukee W2
Dale Norton, Director, Riverworks Teaching Factory
Duane Schultz, Coordinator, Workplace Education Programs, Workforce Development Institute, Milwaukee Area Technical College
Mernathan Sykes, Instructor, Learning Center, Riverworks
Jean Tyler, Consultant, Milwaukee Public Schools
John Wright, Community Service Jobs Coordinator, Project New Hope

NATIONAL EXPERTS

Sister Andre Marie, Administrator, Marion Manor
April Bender, Project EDGE, St. Lawrence BOCES
Linnea Berg, Project Match
Stephen Bell, Training Manager, John Hancock Insurance Co.
Thomas Corbett, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin
Seth Evans, Director, Cooperative Home Health Care of Boston
Dorian Fliegel, Consultant, Cross-cultural workplace training
Rachel Goodman, Direct Placement Manager, Mass Job Training, Inc.
Mark Greenberg, Center for Law and Social Policy
Toby Herr, Project Match, Erikson Institute
Alice Johnson, National Institute for Literacy
Rebekah Lashman, Boston Private Industry Council
George Moriarty, Director of Employment Services, Boston Private Industry Council
Garrett Murphy, former Director of Adult Education, State of New York
Brandon Roberts, Brandon Roberts and Associates
Dorie Seavey, Consultant, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women

APPENDIX II

Jobs for the Future's Employer Survey: Description and Methodology

Jobs for the Future's telephone survey consisted of a series of open-ended questions designed to take 25 to 30 minutes. We targeted potential respondents in two ways: first, employers doing business in either Milwaukee or Cleveland, the two Midwestern cities selected for site-specific investigation; and second, employers likely to hire people with qualifications similar to those of welfare recipients.

To develop a pool of potential respondents, The Jobs Connection of Milwaukee and WIRENet of Cleveland were asked to provide names of employers or industries that had recently hired welfare recipients. These lists were used, after deleting the names of any welfare recipients to protect their privacy, to develop a list of target industries for each city. Names and telephone numbers of employers in these industry classifications were obtained from a commercial supplier.

The initial phone call to the employers "screened" for firms that currently hired (or in the near future would hire) people who had a high school diploma or less. Employers who met this requirement and were willing to take part in the survey were asked to name the positions that people with such qualifications were hired into. If the respondent identified more than two positions, he/she was asked to select the two positions for which the firm was most likely to make hires in the near future.

A total of 43 surveys were completed with firms in the industries listed in Table A-1. Manufacturing was heavily represented among our respondents (including the metal, machine, plastics, paper, leather, chemicals and printing industries). This emphasis was deliberate, in part because WIRENet, our primary contact for Cleveland employers, is a consortium of manufacturing employers, and in part because the manufacturing industry is important in the Midwest and a potential source of decent-paying entry-level jobs. Our original lists contained two additional industry categories: fast food and bar-and-grill. We attempted to survey establishments in these industries, but found that the pace of work was too hectic for managers or supervisors to have the time to spend half an hour on the phone.

TABLE A-1
INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATIONS OF EMPLOYERS RESPONDING TO JOBS FOR THE FUTURE'S TELEPHONE SURVEY

Country club	3
Small office	1
Hospital	4
Hotel/motel	4
Manufacturing/distribution & sales	2
Manufacturing	19
Nursing home	7
Telemarketing	1
Transportation	2

Information was obtained for 66 positions. Twenty-three of the firms supplied information about two entry-level positions; the other 20 respondents either lacked the time or knowledge to discuss more than one position, or the firm itself had only one category of position that met our criterion of "high school or less." The positions for which we obtained information are listed in Table A-2.

We did not attempt to obtain, and did not obtain, a representative sample of employers (nationally, locally or by industry sector). As a result, generalizations cannot be made from the quantitative patterns of these responses (e.g., "83% of the employers we surveyed responded..." cannot be generalized to "83% of the employers in the U.S. do..."). We supplemented the telephone survey with several visits to worksites, and interviews with practitioners in Milwaukee and Cleveland. The information we obtained from these sources was used anecdotally in the report, but is not included in the analysis of survey responses.

TABLE A-2
TITLES OF JOB POSITIONS FOR WHICH INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED FROM THE EMPLOYERS SURVEYED

General laborer, shop helper, etc.	18
Press operator, etc. (semi-skilled)	6
Food service, dietary aide	10
Nursing assistant, health aide	8
Office support	8
Housekeeper/groundsworker	10
Front desk/hotel/motel	2
Telemarketing rep/sales	2
Mover/driver	2

Our goal was to establish the range of employer practice in the area of training of low-skill, entry-level employees. Because of the small size of the sample and its focus on two communities, we report on clear patterns, but with intentionally imprecise terms such as "many" or "few," or "approximately one-half" to avoid the impression that they are representative.

In the survey instrument itself, the first series of questions addressed a specific entry-level position in the company. Three questions asked about the ways that people in the entry-level position learned how to do their jobs:

> *Does your company provide any formal training or other support to new employees in this position to help them learn to do their jobs?*
>
> *Thinking now of all the people who've been in this job for 6 months or longer, Has your company provided any formal support to help them learn to do their job better during the past three years?*
>
> *Has your company got any plan for doing more than it currently does to help these workers learn to do their jobs during the next three years?*

Two questions asked about the value of those positions:

> *Thinking of the _____ position, and looking at the way the company works today, do these jobs represent a way for new people to move up into more responsible jobs in the company (possible responses: no real chance, small chance, moderate chance, good chance, excellent chance)?*
>
> *Still thinking of the _____ position, how is **quality of work performed** in the job related to keeping the company competitive? (possible responses: almost no relation, small relation, moderate relation, strong relation, very strong relation)?*

The remaining survey questions probed firm-wide practices. The first set of these question asked the respondent to listen to brief descriptions of "innovative ways to help people learn to do their jobs better," and then tell us whether their company used this practice. If the response was "yes," we probed for some details; if the response was "no," we asked whether there had been company discussion of the practice, etc. The approaches we asked about are:

- Mentoring/"buddy" systems
- Broad understanding of the company/industry
- Credentialing of skills learned on the job

A final series of questions concerned hypothetical welfare recipients who might be hired to work in the company. The respondent was asked to imagine the company's response to three situations in which the new employees are having trouble (not showing up on time, etc.; having trouble learning the technical part of their job; not learning the skills they need to move up in the company), and a supportive senior manager tries to "sell" management on the idea of providing additional training for them.

Employer Survey on Work-Based Learning
Jobs for the Future 1996

TO THE PERSON WHO ANSWERS THE PHONE

Good morning. I am calling from Jobs for the Future, a national non-profit organization that focuses on the transitions between work and learning in the global economy. We are currently talking with businesses in the Milwaukee (Cleveland) area. This is not an attempt to sell anything. Could I please talk with the person responsible for hiring and training?

TO THE PERSON WHO RESPONDS TO THIS REFERRAL

Hello. My name is _____. I am calling from Jobs for the Future, a national non-profit organization that focuses on the transitions between work and learning in the global economy. We are currently talking with businesses in the Milwaukee (Cleveland) area with positions that don't require any college education. This is not an attempt to sell anything, and will take less than two minutes of your time. Are you the person responsible for hiring and training employees?

IF NO:
Who makes these decisions in your organization? Would you help transfer me to that line?
Thank you
[return to script: "To the person who responds to this referral," above]

IF YES:
Does your company have any positions—filled or unfilled—that do not require any college education?

IF NO: [terminate the conversation: *thank you for your time, etc.*]

IF YES: [APPROPRIATE PERSON HAS BEEN REACHED]

Jobs for the Future is conducting telephone surveys with selected Milwaukee (Cleveland) companies about their hiring and training practices for these entry-level positions. It would take no more than twenty five minutes of your time and could be as short as ten minutes, scheduled at your convenience. This is NOT related to sales or fundraising, and all information would be completely confidential. We are a non-profit organization, and cannot offer you a gratuity, but we can offer you a copy of the report we will produce for the Joyce Foundation, which is funding this research. May we make an appointment to call you?

[If you are asked why there's such a wide variation between the short and long time estimate, explain that some companies we've called have gone through the survey very quickly while others have had a lot of comments they wanted to make.]

YES Proceed now (Skip to questions that start on the next page)

Call back
date: _____
time: _____
ask for: _____
(name)
_____
(title)

NO Comments _____
_____
_____

END OF SCREENER/BEGINNING OF SURVEY

Thank you very much for agreeing to help us. Before going on, let me ask whether I have your permission tape record this phone call — the *only* reason is to save time by not taking written notes. Everything you say will be confidential, regardless. No one will have access to the tapes except for project staff.

YES **NO**

1. And — this is the _____ [company].
[Fill in if possible without wasting time with respondent.]

2. And you belong to the _____ industry.

We at Jobs for the Future are interested in finding out what's happening to jobs for people with a high school diploma or less.

You said that your organization/company *does* have jobs like this at present — not necessary hiring at the moment, but the next time you do hire, you won't require any college education?

PART ONE OF THE SURVEY

This survey has 3 parts. In this first part, I'm going to be asking questions about these entry-level jobs.

3. First, could you please tell me the titles of these jobs that only require a diploma or less — nothing detailed. I'm just trying to find out what kinds of work the people do in general.

_____

_____

_____

_____

[If the respondent gives you the names of particular jobs, you need to establish several categories that capture the particular jobs. For example: *mailroom, copy machine operator, receptionist* would = *office support; dishwasher, line worker, cook* = *food service*. There is no right or wrong answer; you are just looking for some "handles" to use to discuss these jobs. Tell the respondent what you think represents the most appropriate categories, and ask whether you're right.]

If there are more than two categories, name them all. Ask the respondent which two they are *most likely to be hiring in during the coming year*. Record the one or two categories you have selected here:

4. _____

_____

Select one of those two categories.

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5. **Thinking of the _____ jobs, and looking at the way the company works today, do these jobs represent a way for new people to move up into more responsible jobs in the company — assuming that the person does a good job? Let me read some possible responses, and tell me which one comes closest to being accurate.**

   1 **no real chance that a person could move up**
   2 **small chance that the person could move up**
   3 **moderate chance...**
   4 **good chance...**
   5 **excellent chance**

6. **Still thinking of these _____ jobs, how is *quality of work performed* in the job related to keeping the company competitive.**

   1 **almost no relation to the quality of our products/services**
   2 **small relation to the quality of our products/services**
   3 **moderate relation...**
   4 **strong relation...**
   5 **very strong relation...**

I'm interested in finding out how people who are newly hired into this job learn how to do the job.

7. **First, does your company provide any formal training or other support to new employees in this position to help them learn to do their jobs?**

[Some companies offer *organized/formal support*: to new employees such as an orientation for all new employees; a written "how-to" manual; or classroom training . Some companies expect new employees to "pick up" the new job by listening to the supervisor and observing other workers. Some companies *formalize* this approach by including "training new employees" in job descriptions, or as one of the skills that employees are paid for in a "pay for skills" system.]

YES

NO

IF YES: Could you please describe for me what your company does?

_____

_____

_____

IF NO: How *does* a new hire learn to do the job? Would you please describe it?

_____

_____

_____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

8. Thinking now of *all the people* who've been in this job for 6 months or longer.....

Has your company provided any formal support to help them *learn to do their job better* during the past three years?

[Some companies: reimburse employees for the costs of education/training courses they take; provide special training sessions in "customer service" or "teamwork"; bring in vendors or equipment or software to provide training in their products; or provide special health and safety training sessions.

NOTE: some companies provide excellent benefits to employees such as on-site daycare or flextime that are not related to *learning how to do the job* — we aren't interested in these benefits.]

YES

NO

IF YES: Could you please describe for me what your company did for these workers?

_____

_____

_____

IF NO: Has this topic ever come up in discussions so you'd know *why* no formal support is provided?

_____

_____

_____

9. Has your company got any plans for doing *more than it currently does to help these workers learn to do their jobs* during the next three years?

YES

NO

IF YES: Could you please describe for me what your company is planning to do?

_____

_____

_____

IF NO: Could you characterize your company as satisfied with its current approach?.....

_____

_____

_____

[If two categories of jobs were identified earlier, do the questions in the shaded block. If *only one* category was identified, skip the shaded block and go to PART TWO OF THE SURVEY.]

A few minutes ago we identified two categories of entry-level jobs that your company might be hiring into during the next year — the second category was _____. I'd like to think about this second category of jobs for a few minutes. I'm going to be asking the same questions I just asked, but this time, be applying them to the _____ category.

10. Thinking of the _____ jobs, and looking at the way the company works today, do these jobs represent a way for new people to move up into more responsible jobs in the company — assuming that the person does a good job? Let me read some possible responses, and tell me which one comes closest to being accurate.

1 **no real chance that a person could move up**
2 **small chance that the person could move up**
3 **moderate chance...**
4 **good chance...**
5 **excellent chance**

11. Still thinking of these_____ jobs, how is *quality of work performed* in the job related to keeping the company competitive.

1 **almost no relation to the quality of our products/services**
2 **small relation to the quality of our products/services**
3 **moderate relation...**
4 **strong relation...**
5 **very strong relation...**

I'm interested in finding out how people who are newly hired into this job learn how to do it.

12. First, does the company provide any *organized or formal* support such as training to new employees in this position?

[Some companies offer *organized/formal support*: to new employees such as an orientation for all new employees; a written "how-to" manual; or classroom training. Some companies expect new employees to "pick up" the new job by listening to the supervisor and observing other workers. Some companies *formalize* this approach by including "training new employees" in job descriptions, or as one of the skills that employees are paid for in a "pay for skills" system.]

YES

NO

IF YES: Could you please describe for me what your company does?

_____

_____

_____

IF NO: How *does* a new hire learn to do the job? Would you please describe it?

_____

_____

_____

Thinking now of *all the people* who've been in this job for 6 months or longer...

13. Has your company provided any formal support to help them *learn to do their job better* during the past three years?

[Some companies: reimburse employees for the costs of education/training courses they take; provide special training sessions in "customer service" or "teamwork"; bring in vendors or equipment or software to provide training in their products; or provide special health and safety training sessions.

NOTE: some companies provide excellent benefits to employees such as on-site daycare or flextime that are not related to *learning how to do the job* — we aren't interested in these benefits.]

YES

NO

IF YES: Could you please describe for me what your company did for these workers?

_____

_____

_____

IF NO: Has this topic ever come up in discussions so you'd know *why* no formal support is provided

_____

_____

_____

14. Has your company got any plans for doing *more than it currently does to help these workers learn to do their jobs* during the next three years?

YES

NO

IF YES: Could you please describe for me what your company is planning to do?

_____

_____

_____

IF NO: Could you characterize your company as satisfied with its current approach?...

_____

_____

_____

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PART TWO OF THE SURVEY

In part two of the survey, I would like to ask you some questions about some innovative ways to help people learn to do their jobs better. We here at JFF have become aware — through our research — of promising approaches to improve the ways people learn in the workplace. We'd like to know how interested companies here in Milwaukee [Cleveland] would be in learning about and using these methods.

I'm going to describe four promising methods to you — one at a time — and ask you some questions about them.

The *first* method is called the "buddy system" or "mentoring." An experienced employee is assigned to be a buddy or mentor to a new or less experienced employee. The mentor is responsible for helping the less experienced employee learn skills or information needed to succeed at the job and in the company.

15. Does your company have a "buddy" or "mentoring" system?

[An example: a nursing home that assigns a buddy to all new orderlies. The "buddy" is an experienced and reliable employee who is assigned to help and watch a new employee for about three weeks — at the end of this time, the buddy is asked to evaluate the new employee.

My impression is that "buddy" systems are short-term, fairly informal, and aimed at lower-skill employees, and that "mentoring" systems are longer-term, more formal, and aimed at grooming upper-level employees. Any discussion you can generate to shed more light will be valuable.]

YES

NO

IF YES: Ask the respondent to describe the buddy/mentoring system his/her company has. Try to find out:

a. The duration of the program as experienced by the employee.

b. What level(s) of employees are able to participate in the *less* experienced role:
entry-level not requiring college
other non-exempts
middle management
senior management

c. If entry-level participants aren't eligible now, are there plans to include them in the future?

d. Whether the program is perceived as "working"; is the feedback good or bad?

_____

_____

_____

IF NO: Ask the respondent whether there's ever been any discussion in the company of introducing buddy/mentor programs. Does the respondent think there's much of a chance that a buddy/mentor program will be introduced in the future.

The *second* method consists of teaching employees a broader knowledge of their company/industry than they actually need to perform their immediate tasks. One example is a grocery store chain that brings in product vendors to give talks to store clerks, so that the clerks have a better understanding of the products they sell — making them better at providing customer service and at selling products.

16. Does your company have any program to provide a broad understanding of your company/industry to employees?

[Other examples: rotating employees through all the stations in their unit, so they are able to do a variety of jobs; reorganizing the employees in a unit so they are a team with responsibilities for scheduling, purchasing, quality control, etc.]

YES

NO

IF YES: Ask the respondent to describe the company's "broader knowledge of the industry" program. Try to find out:

a. What the program consists of — speakers, classes, job rotation, etc.

b. What level(s) of employees are able to participate as learners (as opposed to providers of knowledge):
- entry-level not requiring college
- other non-exempts
- middle management
- senior management

c. If entry-level participants aren't eligible now, are there plans to include them in the future?

d. Whether the program is perceived as "working"; is the feedback good or bad?

IF NO: Ask the respondent whether there's ever been any discussion in the company of trying to provide employees with a broader understanding of their company/industry. This is a pretty new concept, so the respondent may not be familiar with it. Does the respondent think there's much of a chance that the company would introduce such a program in the future?

17. The *third* method has several different names. Some companies have introduced a version of it called "pay for skills" or "pay for performance." In these programs, the company identifies the skills that are needed to perform any given job, then develops a system for certifying employees in these skills, and then begins to link *pay* to *skill performance*. We call any of these approaches "credentialing" because they provide employees with documentation that credentials their skills — kind of like licenses issued by professional associations or states. Does your company have *any* system for credentialing employees' skills like this?

YES

NO

IF YES: Ask the respondent to describe the company's approach to credentialing skills. Try to find out:

a. What the approach consists of — is it a formal pay-for-performance program (as described above) or is it different? If different, how?

b. What level(s) of employees participate?
- entry-level not requiring college
- other non-exempts
- middle management
- senior management

c. If entry-level participants don't participate now, are there plans to include them in the future?

d. Whether the program is perceived as "working"; is the feedback good or bad?

IF NO: Ask the respondent whether there's ever been any discussion in the company of trying to introduce a credentialing program such as pay-for-performance? If so, what are the arguments for and against? Does the respondent think it likely that the company will introduce such a program in the future?

18. As a follow-up on this discussion of credentialing, I'd like to ask about a related method — this is the last one I'm going to talk about. It's a version of credentialing in which employers give *qualified* employees *when they are exiting the company*, a document that lists the skills that the employee used while on the job. I'm going to call this *exit credentialing*. Does your company currently do any version of exit credentialing?

YES

NO

IF YES: Ask the respondent to describe what they do for exit credentialing. Try to find out:

a. What the approach consists of — is there a formal credential document? How is it provided? How is it decided which exiting employees qualify. Did this occur in a layoff/outplacement context (for example, an outplacement organization helped all laid-off employees develop a resume)? If so, was the practice adopted for the company's current employees?

b. What level(s) of employees are eligible?
- entry-level not requiring college
- other non-exempts
- middle management
- senior management

c. If entry-level participants aren't eligible now, are there plans to include them in the future?

d. Whether the program is perceived as "working"; is the feedback good or bad?

IF NO: Ask the respondent whether there's ever been any discussion in the company of trying to introduce provide credentials to exiting employees? If so, what are the arguments for and against? Has the issue of liability entered the discussion (i.e., former employees suing for damages incurred when denied a job because of a poor reference)? If so, might the discussion be reopened if the state passes laws to limit employer liability?

PART THREE OF THE SURVEY

We have now reached the third and final part of the survey. In this part of the survey I'm going to ask some questions about your company its approach to hiring people who have been on welfare. As you probably know, Wisconsin (Ohio) has introduced a welfare reform program called *welfare-to-work* that requires people currently receiving welfare to get jobs, preferably in the private sector.

Welfare-to-work programs are so new that most companies don't have any experience with them yet. SO....I'm going to ask you to *imagine* some hypothetical situations in which your company hires some people who are welfare recipients. We want to find out how companies will react to various circumstances. Here is the *overall* imaginary scenario: your company has hired some welfare recipients. One of the company's senior managers becomes responsible for them and becomes their advocate. I'm going to read you several imaginary scenarios.

[If the respondent volunteers information about past hires probe for detail.

If the respondent sounds reluctant, assure him/her that we are NOT interested in finding jobs for welfare recipients, or in finding out whether particular companies would hire welfare recipients at this time.]

19. ***In the first situation,*** **the senior manager discovers that the welfare recipients are showing up late and missing too many days of work. This manager makes a pitch to the company's decision makers in which he says:**

    These welfare recipients aren't going to make it here if something doesn't change — they don't show up on time, they miss too many days, and so on. I recommend that we offer them some special training in our company's basic work rules?

How easy or difficult do you imagine it would be for this senior manager to convince the company decision makers to provide this special training? I'm going to read you five choices, and you tell me which one comes the closest to what you think would happen?

____ **a very hard sell**
____ **a hard sell**
____ **average sell**
____ **an easy sell**
____ **a very easy sell**

20. **Now imagine this second situation. The senior manager finds out that the welfare recipients are coming to work on time, but are having a hard time learning how to do the *technical part* of their job. Here's what the senior manager says to the decision makers?**

    These welfare recipients aren't carrying out their assignments correctly, so I propose that the company provide them with some training.

Would that be:

____ **a very hard sell**
____ **a hard sell**
____ **average sell**
____ **an easy sell**
____ **a very easy sell**

21. In the third situation, the senior manager discovers that the welfare recipients' basic and technical skills are OK, but realizes that they lack the broader skills necessary to qualify for pay and benefits increases in your company or elsewhere. Here's what he says to the decision makers:

These welfare recipients who are working for us are not going to qualify for promotions here without additional training:, so I propose that the company provide it for them.

Would that be:

____ **a very hard sell**
____ **a hard sell**
____ **average sell**
____ **an easy sell**
____ **a very easy sell**

[Stop for a second: try to characterize the respondent's answers to the preceding three questions. Are you hearing that providing support to welfare recipients will be an *easy* sell or a *hard* sell? Ask the respondent to confirm your characterization.]

22. I think I hear you saying that this senior manager is going to have a *hard* time (*easy* time) selling these ideas to the decision makers. Now I'd like to ask you to think about some approaches this senior manager might use, and tell me whether they would make it an *easier sell* or a *harder sell* ?

Here's the first approach. The senior manager says to the decision makers:

The kind of training I'm talking about won't cost the company anything. I'm recommending that we assign an experienced employee to be a "buddy" to each of these welfare recipients, to show them the ropes here at the company.

Would that make it a *harder* sell or an *easier* sell?
[Push the respondent a little with "much" harder or easier, but save some time by not reading the list each time, unless asked to.]

____ a much harder sell
____ a harder sell
____ no difference
____ an easier sell
____ a much easier sell

23. Here's the second approach. The senior manager says:

This training I'm talking about for the welfare recipients won't cost us too much because I've found some low-cost materials that show us how to set up and run a program like this?

Would that make it a *harder* sell or an *easier* sell?

____ a much harder sell
____ a harder sell
____ no difference
____ an easier sell
____ a much easier sell

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24. Here's the third approach. The senior manager says:

This training won't cost us too much because I've found an experienced organization here in town that will train the recipients as long as we provide them with information about job tasks.

Would that make it a *harder* sell or an *easier* sell?

____ a much harder sell
____ a harder sell
____ no difference
____ an easier sell
____ a much easier sell

25. In the fourth approach, the senior manager says:

I've investigated and found that the training I'm talking about for the welfare recipients won't cost us much at all because there's a federal tax credit available if we do it.

Would that make it a *harder* sell or an *easier* sell?

____ a much harder sell
____ a harder sell
____ no difference
____ an easier sell
____ a much easier sell

Finally, let's imagine that the senior manager *does* convince the decision makers to provide training to the welfare recipients. I have two questions about how it would happen.

26. First, how do you see the training being provided — to all the employees in the unit, or just to the welfare recipients?
[Probe for comments.]

All employees in unit
Welfare recipients only

27. Here's the second question: what do you think the role of your line supervisors would be, once senior management gave a directive about providing training? [Probe for comments.]

This is the end of the survey. You've given us a lot of your time and ideas, and we are very appreciative. This will help us a great deal with our report. Would you be interested in receiving a complementary copy of the report?

IF YES:

Can I confirm your name, and get your mailing address, so we can send the report to you?

_____
(Name)

_____
(Address)

_____

_____

_____
(Company name)

_____
(Phone number)

Thank you. [Conclude the interview.]

Rating of the respondent. Would he/she be open to a call back to investigate the possibility of talking to other people in the company, possibly on site.

_____ Interested/send thank-you letter with request to follow up

_____ Not interested/send pro forma thank-you letter

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